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T H E

CHRISTIAN'S F A I T H

A

Rational Assent.

IN ANSWER TO A PAMPHLET,
Entituled,

*CHRISTIANITY not founded on
Argument, &c.*

B Y

THOMAS RANDOLPH, D.D.

Vicar of Petham in Kent; and late Fellow
of C. C. C. OXON.

*Be ready always to give an Answer to every Man
that asketh you a Reason of the Hope that is in
you. 1 Pet. iii. 15.*

L O N D O N,

Printed for M. COOPER at the *Globe* in *Pater-Noster-
Row*, MDCCXLIV.

A D V E R T I S E M E N T.

THE *Advantages of publick Education,*
a Sermon by *Tho. Randolph*, Fellow of
C. C. C.

*An Enquiry into the Sufficiency of Reason
in Matters of Religion,* A Sermon, by *Tho.
Randolph*, Vicar of *Petham*.

Both printed for *Mary Fletcher* in the *High-
Street*, Oxford.

T O T H E

Most Reverend Father in God

F O H N,

By Divine Providence

Lord Archbishop of CANTERBURY,
Primate of all ENGLAND,
and *Metropolitan.*

May it please your Grace,

TO accept of this Work of one
of your Sons and Presbyters,
wrote in Defence of our common
Faith, of which your Grace is, under
God and his Majesty, the great Sup-
port and Ornament.

The Nature of the Design, your
Grace's high Station in the Church,
and your known Zeal and Concern

for the Interests of Religion would induce me to lay it at your Grace's Feet, though I had not been oblig'd to do so in Acknowledgment of many personal Favours. And that remarkable Goodness which gives so distinguishing a Lustre to all your Grace's Actions, encourages me to hope, that you will favourably accept my good Intentions, and overlook the Defects of the Performance.

An Attempt to vindicate our Holy Religion from the artful Misrepresentations of an insidious Adversary, cannot but be acceptable to your Grace, who so thoroughly understand its Grounds and Principles, and have always so cordially espous'd its Cause.

If I have shewn any Skill in unraveling his Sophistry, or any Knowledge in the Doctrines of the Gospel, I learnt it from your Grace's Example and Instructions.

As I esteem it my Happiness to have liv'd from my Youth up under
your

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your Grace's Influence and Inspection, so I cannot but rejoyce to see the same Learning, Wisdom, and Piety, which had so long presided in one of our Fountains of Learning, now extending its Influence throughout the whole Kingdom.

The Christian Religion, though it stands firm and secure upon its proper Evidence, will yet receive fresh Strength and Lustre, while Examples, like your Grace's, of an exact Conformity to the Rules prescrib'd by it, set it in a Light, at once so conspicuous, and so amiable; and the Church of *England* in particular will be able to defy the severest Assaults of its most malicious Opposers, whilst it flourishes under your Grace's Protection, defended by your Writings, adorn'd by your Example, supported and govern'd by a Zeal according to Knowledge; a Zeal temper'd with Charity, arm'd with Firmness, and guided by Discretion.

I shall

I shall add no more, but my hearty Prayers to God for your Grace's Happiness and long Life; and in these (I doubt not but) all who love our Lord *Jesus Christ* will readily join with,

Your Grace's dutiful Son,

and most obedient

humble Servant,

THOMAS RANDOLPH.

T H E
CHRISTIAN'S FAITH
A
RATIONAL ASSENT.

ONE might reasonably have thought, that a Religion, which is evidently calculated to make us happy both here and hereafter; which teaches us the purest and most exalted Virtue; and promises us *Glory, and Honour, and Immortality*, should meet at least with a favourable Reception, should be listened to with Attention, and examined with Candour and Equity. We find Men, in temporal Affairs, ready enough to believe any thing, which makes for their Interest; eager to catch at every Bubble, which promises them Gain; and willing to *believe in Hope, even against Hope*. Is it not strange then that Men should be prejudiced against *the Gospel of Peace*; and unwilling to believe *the glad Tidings of good Things*, on the very same Evidence which they readily admit in every other Affair of Life? That they should greedily catch at every trifling Objection, and industriously shelter themselves under any vain Pretence, lest

B

they

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they should be forced to admit a Revelation, which promises them the Pardon of their Sins, the Favour of God, and a glorious and happy Immortality? Whoever will look into some of the late Writings in Favour of Infidelity, will, I believe, find there is but too much Reason for such a Complaint. Infidelity has, of late Years, been propagated with an unaccountable Zeal and Industry; and Christianity has been attacked on every Side: Her Doctrines have been misrepresented, and her Evidences set in a false Light; all the Engines of Sophistry have been employed against us, and no Art or Disguise left untried. Several Methods have been used to this purpose by different Persons; and, as soon as one Scheme has been defeated, we have seen a new one advanced with equal Assurance. Not many Years ago Christianity was attacked under the Person of a *Jew*; the Evidence of Miracles was disputed, and the Proof from Prophecy misrepresented. Soon after a more open Assault was made upon our Saviour's Miracles; the Reality of the Facts was called in Question, and the History burlesqued in the Language and Spirit of *Billingsgate*. At length arose a bold Adventurer, who undertook to prove, that Revelation was a thing, in its own Nature, impossible; that the Light of Reason was abundantly sufficient without it; and that *the Bulk of Mankind* were able, without any Assistance, by the Use of their natural Facul-

ties, to know and practise whatever God requires of them. I need not take notice of the many excellent Answers, which have been occasioned by these Performances. The Cause of Religion has, I am persuaded, received fresh Strength from these unsuccessful Attacks; her Grounds have been hereby more distinctly considered, and her Evidences set in a clearer Light.

But now the Enemy appears in quite another Shape. This almighty Reason, this *Domina rerum & Regina Ratio*, is now tumbled from her Throne. She who said in her Heart, *I will ascend into Heaven, I will exalt my Throne above the Stars of God*, is now degraded to the Condition of the Beasts of the Field. Reason, which not long ago could teach us *whatever God requires of us*, is now become fit scarce for any valuable Purpose. Not only ^a *the Generality* of Mankind (we are told) are incapable of *reasoning at all*, and thrown out at once at the very Mention of introducing a Medium, but even ^b *the ablest and best of Men* are disqualified for fair Reasoning by their natural Prejudices. This self-sufficient Reason can give us no ^c *Satisfaction*, no Comfort: ^d It is *precarious and changeable*, and shifts about with every Wind: ^e It can neither bridle our Passions, secure our Virtue, nor arm us against the Fear of Death. ^f It has no manner of

^a Pag. 17. ^b P. 23. ^c P. 29. ^d P. 26. ^e P. 30, &c.
^f P. 7.

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Concern (it seems) in the Affairs of Religion. ^a Nay, 'tis *dangerous* to attempt the Proof of Religion by Reason; or *even the plainest Question in Nature, the Existence of a Deity itself.* ^b The only Means of coming at the Knowledge of divine Truths is (we are told) by immediate Inspiration; ^c *a constant and particular Revelation imparted separately and supernaturally to every Individual.* These Gentlemen, it seems, can put on any Disguise, and fight under any Colours:

Dolus, an Virtus, quis in Hoste requirat?

They can dispute either Way, *confute, change Hands, and still confute*, — as effectually as before. They find it, I suppose, safer and easier covertly to undermine, than openly to assault. They are in Hopes the most impregnable Fortrefs may be betrayed under the Pretence of Friendship; and the best Cause defeated by an aukward and treacherous Defence of it. Our Author has therefore thought fit to assume the Character of a zealous Christian; he adopts and patronizes the Errors of some sincere, but enthusiastick Believers, and carries them to a Height of Extravagance beyond what their first Authors ever dreamt of; and then he would persuade us, that this Phantom of his own dressing up is really the Religion of *Christ* and his

^a Pag. 81.

^b P. 56.

^c P. 112.

Apostles. This affords him a Pretence for sapping the Rock, on which Christianity hath stood for so many Ages; and placing it on a Foundation, on which, he knows, it can never be supported. But the Disguise he has put on, is so thin, that it is easily seen through. ^a His contemptuous Treatment of Scripture, ^b his gross Misrepresentations of *Christ* and his Apostles, ^c his Exceptions against our Saviour's Miracles, and his avowed Opposition to the Gospel Evidences, plainly enough discover from what Quarter the Blow comes. If any one thinks I charge him wrongfully, I only desire him to suspend his Judgment till he has read over these Sheets; and then I believe he will be able to judge what Spirit this Writer is of.

But I am more concerned with the Tendency of his Pamphlet, than with the Design of its Author. As it seems naturally calculated to undermine the Foundations of Christianity, I shall, without any farther Enquiry into his Views or Principles, endeavour to obviate his Pretences, and return an Answer to the Objections he has thrown out against the Reasonableness of Religion.

The Point our Author undertakes in his Title-Page to prove, is, that *Christianity* is not founded on Argument; and, in Page 7, he more fully explains his Design: ^d He tells us, that *the judging at all of religious Mat-*

^a See pag. 60, 61. ^b P. 36, &c. P. 66, &c. ^c P. 46, &c.
^d P. 7.

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ters is not the proper Province of Reason, or indeed an Affair where she has any Concern; that our boasted Rational Faith is a false unwarranted Notion, without the least Ground to support it, either in Nature, or Revelation; that our Assent to Reveal'd Truths is not to be founded upon the Conviction of our Understanding; and Lastly, that Reason, or the Intellectual Faculty, could not possibly be a Principle intended by God to lead us into a true Faith. This is, as our Author observes, the great Point in which we differ: It will be necessary therefore, in the First Place, to enquire how far we differ, and state what I mean when in Opposition to this Writer, I affirm the Christian Faith to be a Rational Assent; and then I shall proceed in the second Place to examine our Author's Arguments, drawn from the Reason of the Thing; Thirdly, I shall consider his Arguments from Scripture; Fourthly, I shall examine his own Scheme, and enquire into the Principle of Gospel-Evidence he has thought fit to assign. Fifthly, I shall offer some Proof of the Christian Religion, under which Head I shall consider this Gentleman's Exceptions against Miracles, and traditional Testimony; Lastly, I shall take some Notice of the Reflections he has thrown out against the Church of England in particular.

- * Our Author would indeed persuade us

that the wisest and safest Way of disputing with *Infidels*, is, to commit their *Writings and Persons to the Flames*: That to enter the *Lists*, and join *Issue* with these *Reasoners* in their own Way, is, to expose ourselves unnecessarily to all the rude *Attacks* of ingenious *Malice*, to the great *Dishonour* often of the *Advocate*, and *Prejudice* of the *Cause*.

I believe these *Reasoners* are in no great Fear of Fire and Faggot: And we are in as little Fear of their *Malice*, or *Rudeness*, or *Ingenuity*. I shall venture therefore to enter the *Lists* with this mighty *Champion*, and join *Issue* with him in his own Way. I am very willing to leave the whole *Determination* of these *Affairs* to the single Force of argumentative *Contentions*: I am fully satisfied the *Cause* of *Christianity* can suffer no *Prejudice* from a *Rational Enquiry*; and shall leave the *Dishonour* to light, where the World shall think proper to fix it.

CH A P. I.

THE Question before us (as I just now said) is, whether the *Christian Faith* is founded on *Argument*, or must be infus'd into us by *immediate Inspiration*, whether it is ordinarily attainable in a rational Way, or to be acquired only by a *particular Revelation* imparted *supernaturally* to every *Individual*. But then, by *Christianity* may be understood

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understood either the Truth of the Christian Revelation, or the particular Doctrines contained in that Revelation. These two Notions of the Word, our Author has all along confounded: And yet, according as the Word is taken in one, or other of these Senses, the Points in Dispute will appear in quite a different Light.

First then, with regard to the Truth of the Christian Revelation, we assert that it is *the proper Province of Reason to judge of it*; that our Belief of it is not infus'd into us by immediate Inspiration; but is, and ought to be *founded upon the Conviction of our Understanding*.

But, as to the particular Doctrines of the Gospel, though most of them are discoverable by our Reason, and none of them are in any wise repugnant to it, yet our Saviour, and his Apostles, had no occasion to appeal to our Reason for the Proof of them. Their Divine Mission being once sufficiently attested, they needed no other Argument to prove the Truth of their Doctrines. After *Christ* had shewn himself ^a *approved of God* by so many *Miracles*, he might well speak, ^b *as one having Authority*. Reason, when once convinced of the Truth of a Revelation, has no farther Occasion to enquire into the Proof of the particular Doctrines it contains. All that remains, is, to examine into the Sense of what is reveal'd. Here again Reason resumes

^a Acts ii. 22.

^b Mat. vii. 29.

her Task : It is her Province to enquire into the Meaning of what is delivered ; and, by comparing the Context, considering the Scope and Design of the Writer, and other Rules of Criticism, determine the Sense of Scripture. But, when this is once settled, we assent to the Truth of the Doctrine, not on the internal Evidence of the Thing itself, but on the Authority of God, who reveal'd it. Nevertheless, this Assent, though founded on Authority, is a *Rational Assent*, because this Authority itself stands upon Reasonable Grounds : Our Reason, on due Examination, teaches us, that such a Doctrine came from God : The same Reason assures us, that, whatever God has reveal'd, must be undoubtedly true : And from hence again our Reason draws this Conclusion, that such a Doctrine must be true. We see then that the Process is all along *Rational* ; and there can remain no Difficulty, but with regard to the Nature of the Evidence, by which the Authority of the Revelation itself is supported.

We do not indeed judge of this in the same Manner, or on the same Principles, as we do of Matters of Science, or Philosophy. It is plain the Nature of the Thing will not admit of it. Every Branch of Knowledge has its proper Principles, and Methods of Proof. The Truth of our Saviour's Mission is a Matter of Fact, and must be prov'd in the same Manner, as all other Matters of Fact are, by

credible Testimony. But yet surely our Assent to it may be Rational, unless any one will say that we can have no Reason to believe any Thing, but what we see with our own Eyes: And I think, we need not desire to drive an Adversary to a greater Absurdity than this is. And yet to this Absurdity our Author is driven. He tells us in so many Words, *‘that to believe a Thing, because another says he saw it, is a very unprecedented and new Sort of Logick.* We shall have hereafter farther Occasion to consider this curious Passage. At present I must take the Liberty to tell him, that this is not such *a new Sort of Logick*, as he would persuade us. It is, and always has been the *Logick* of the whole World. All Men believe a thousand Things they never saw, and think they have good Reason for so doing. Nay, the very Notion of *Belief* has always been thought to import an Assent founded on Testimony: This Gentleman himself too will perhaps, upon Enquiry, be found to make use of the same *Sort of Logick*. If he was called on a Jury to decide a Matter of Fact, though he was himself no Eye-Witness to it, yet, if there appeared creditable Persons to testify it, I hope he would not bring in his Verdict *Ignoramus*. I may suppose he never was at *China*, or *Japan*: And yet, I presume, he believes there are such Countries in the World. It is

very certain he never saw *Queen Elizabeth*: And yet I will venture to answer for him, he has not the least Doubt whether there ever was such a Person. Nay farther, on this *Logick*, which is so *new* to our Author, depends no small Part of Human Knowledge. If this is not to be admitted, all History is at once discarded; and Geography and Chronology must follow. Without this neither Astronomy, nor Experimental Philosophy can subsist. The Practice of Law will be at an End, and our Courts must be shut up; no Records, nor the Laws themselves can be of any Authority, nor can there be any such Thing as Legal Evidence. The Physician can make no Use of the Observations of others: He must lay aside his *Sydenham* and *Hippocrates*; he can depend upon nothing but his own proper Experience, nor pretend to any more, than an Apothecary, or old Nurse. Nay, there can be no Use of Speech; there is an End of all Commerce, and Conversation: If no one will believe us, we may all of us for ever after hold our Tongue. We must then beg leave to say, that we may have Rational Assurance of a well-attested Matter of Fact, though we cannot have ocular Demonstration of it.

^d But *venerable Tradition, and Historical Records, though never so plausible and well attested, will not (it seems) satisfy our Au-*

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thor : Nothing less will content him, than
‘ an irresistible Light from Heaven, ‘ that
will not leave him one Moment liable to a Possi-
bility of Error and Imposition.

But why should fallible Man expect, or
 require, *absolute and infallible Certainty?*
 If we have as full Evidence, as the Nature
 of the Thing will admit, why should we call
 for more? He, who rejects the same Proof in
 favour of Religion, which in all other Cases
 he acts upon without Scruple, must stand
 self-condemned. It is plain, that such a Man
 is not guided by Reason, but by Interest, and
 Affection. God in all his Dispensations deals
 with us, as with Free Agents. He has given
 us sufficient Motives and Encouragements
 to the Practice of Virtue: But he does not
 over-rule our Wills; nor does he work so
 powerfully upon our Hopes, or Fears, as to
 leave scarce any Room for our own free
 Choice. § He does not *execute Sentence*
speedily upon every evil Work; nor make
 Happiness, or Misery, the immediate and
 necessary Consequence of Virtue, or Vice.
^h *He has not left himself without Witness* of
 his Being and Providence; but has given us
 such Proofs as must satisfy every reasonable
 Man, ⁱ such as must leave every one, who
 rejects them, *without Excuse*. But he has
 not given us all the Proof, that was possible

^c P. 59. ^f P. 60. § Eccles. viii. 11. ^h Acts xiv. 17.
ⁱ Rom. i. 20.

to be given : Nor does he *make bare his Almighty Arm* on every Occasion. In like Manner, we conceive that God has confirmed the Truth of the Gospel by such Evidence, as will convince every sincere and impartial Enquirer, though he does not ^k*flash Conviction* upon all Men *by an irresistible Light from Heaven*. He has left some Room for Choice and Virtue in the Christian Believer. Nay, such an irresistible Inspiration could be but of little Service to the vitious Man, unless God by another irresistible Impression should over-rule his Will, as well as his Understanding, and make him impeccable, as well as infallible. This would indeed effectually banish both Error, and Vice, out of the World : But it would at the same Time banish Virtue too. For without Free Choice there could be no Virtue. Men thus acted upon could be no more capable of Virtue, than a Clock, or a Weather-Glass : They might go right, but it would be, because they were so set, and could go no otherwise.

¹ But our Author speaks with *Contempt* of the ingenious Contrivance of abating a Degree of Evidence to leave the more Room for the Merit of *Voluntiers*. If there is still left sufficient Evidence, we need not trouble ourselves about the *Abatements*, that may have been made in it. No one is expected to enlist himself a *Voluntier* in the Christian Cause

^k See p. 59. ¹ P. III.

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without full Evidence of the Truth of his Religion, and good Security for his Reward. God may have left Room for Choice and Virtue in Matters of Faith: But *Merit* we place none in believing what without the greatest Folly, and Demerit, we could not refuse our Assent to. But let us suppose the Gospel to be a kind of Touch-stone to try Men's Hearts; attended with such Evidence, as must satisfy every Lover of Truth and Virtue; but not sufficient to overbalance the Prejudices of unreasonable and wicked Men, can any one blame this *ingenious Contrivance*? The good Man need not; for he is satisfied: The wicked Man cannot; for, if he is not satisfied, 'tis plainly his own Fault: Our Author cannot, ^m for he has own'd that God is *strictly justifiable in withdrawing his Light from such as chuse to sit in Darknes, and absolutely refusing all Means of Conviction to such, as by their Ingratitude and Neglect had render'd themselves unworthy of all farther Sollicitation, and would, by their Infidelity of Spirit, render its Operations, if tried, of no Effect.*

When we say then, that *the Christian Faith is a Rational Assent*, we mean that just and satisfactory Reasons may be given for the Hope and Faith we profess: Such Reasons, as all Men admit in Cases of the like Nature; such as must satisfy every unprejudiced Per-

son; such as must leave the Unbeliever, to whom they are fairly propounded, without Excuse. Our Religion submits its Pretensions to a fair Trial, and is not afraid of the severest Enquiry. It appeals to the Judgment of impartial Reason, and desires no other Favour, than a sober and dispassionate Examination.

But it may not be improper to add something here concerning the Nature of *Assent*. It is a favourite Principle with our Author, the main Hinge indeed, on which most of his Arguments turn, that our *Assent* is no way in our own Power. ^a He asserts roundly, without any Exception, or Restriction, that *Conviction is in its own Nature a necessary and independent Event, under no Influence of ours; and that we have no Power to interpose to direct its Course or Operations.* This is indeed an admirable Plea for Infidelity. If it is never in our own Power to believe, or disbelieve, the Unbeliever is fully justified, and must for ever stand free from all Guilt, or Censure. But the Misfortune is, that the Libertine will put in his Claim too for the same Indulgence. ^o *We are delivered to do all these Abominations,* has been of old a Plea for Immorality, as well as Irreligion. Nay, if our Understanding is so necessarily tied down, as this Gentleman seems to assert, I am afraid it will be very difficult to maintain the

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Freedom of the Will. Our Understanding must first pronounce a thing eligible, before the Will can make choice of it. If therefore our Understanding acts necessarily, our Will must lie under the same Necessity; and then there is an End of all Virtue, as well as Religion. I am told indeed, that a celebrated Writer against Christianity has made use of this very Argument to overthrow the Freedom of the Will.

But to leave such metaphysical Speculations, and consider what common Sense and Experience in this Case teaches us. We acknowledge, then, that the Understanding is so far necessarily determined, that what we clearly perceive to be true, we cannot help assenting to; neither can we help dissenting from what we clearly perceive to be false. We farther acknowledge, that such Proof of a Truth may, in some Cases, be offered, as may necessarily determine our Assent. A plain Demonstration properly laid before us, and duly attended to, must, and will ensure Conviction. But yet we apprehend, that Men have still a great Compass of Liberty in the Use and Direction of those Faculties, on which our Assent depends.

For, in the first Place, let the Proof be ever so convincing, 'tis certainly in our own Choice, whether we will hear it or no: Let the Light shine ever so strong, 'tis still in our Power to shut it out. I have heard a Story of two Gentlemen, who had a Dispute a-

bout a Passage in *Virgil*. One of them laid a Wager he convinced the other in half an Hour. He accordingly produced the Book; but the other refused to look in it till the Time was expired; and so won his Wager. Here, you see, is an easy Method of avoiding *Conviction*, and preventing this *necessary and independent Event* from taking Place. And, I am afraid, it is as common as it is easy. Nothing is more usual than for People to hear, and read only what is said on one Side of the Question; to be impatient of Debate, and never suffer their favourite Opinions to be disputed. How common is it for wicked Men to shut their Eyes against the Light, to *count them their Enemies, who tell them the Truth*, and studiously to avoid every thing, which may make them sensible of their Folly and Danger?

But perhaps our Author means, that Conviction must necessarily follow after Debate and Examination: *a If I am once left free to examine* (says he) *I can by no means be tied up in the Issue. It is — a necessary — Event.* — Let us then suppose the Debate set on Foot, and our Opinions brought to the Trial. A great deal is still left in our own Power. Our Will and Affections have a great Ascendant over our Judgments: The same Evidence will operate very differently, according as the Person is previously inclined and dispos-

^a Pag. 5.

ed; and these previous Dispositions and Inclinations are, in a great Measure, in our own Power. ^b *A Gift doth blind the Eyes of the Wise*, and gives a Bias, not only to the Will, but often to the Understanding too. Where a Person is violently prejudiced against the Truth, the strongest Evidence will make but a weak Impression on him. If a Judge then shall take a Bribe, or suffer his Affections to enlist themselves on one Side of the Question, he is doubtless to blame, and may be punished for giving wrong Judgment. Again, 'tis in our own Breast whether we will duly attend to the Proofs on each Side. We may manage the Trial, and *direct its Course and Operations* according as we are inclined. We may call or refuse Evidence as we please, and examine them as we judge proper. We may shut up the Debate when we will, and precipitate Judgment, without hearing the Merits of the Cause. Though we cannot help assenting to what we clearly perceive to be true; yet we may, and too often do assent without clear Perception. And of all this we see daily Examples in common Life. The same Reasons, which shall satisfy an unprejudiced Person, shall be offered in vain to another Person of equal intellectual Capacity, who is strongly prepossessed the other Way. Nay, the same Person shall except against the same Proof in one Case, which

^b Deut. xvi. 19.

he readily admits in another. Offer to any Man an Argument, that shall tend to establish his favourite Opinions, or sooth him in his darling Vice, how ready will he be to listen to you, how hasty to close in with the least Appearance of Argument? Go to the same Person, and attempt to persuade him of something that shall clash with his Interest, or thwart his Inclinations, how impatiently will he hear you? How greedily will he catch at every trifling Objection? How difficultly will he admit the strongest Proofs? *Non persuadebis, etiamsi persuadearis.*

But perhaps our Author would say, that, after a fair and impartial Examination, setting aside all Prejudices and Prepossessions, the Proof must act necessarily on the Understanding. Very true, if there were nothing to determine our Judgment but the Evidence of the Thing, it must be determined by that. But this is so far from being to our Author's Purpose, that it makes directly against him. If all Men were unprejudiced, it may be presumed they would, in all plain Cases, think just alike; and, if so, *Conviction* would, in such Cases, be no *dubious or uncertain Consequence of Debate*; and Men might be *left free to examine*, without any Danger of their being deceived *in the Issue*. But if Men will not receive plain Proof, 'tis manifest they are under the Influence of Prejudices and Prepossessions.

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If they reject the same Evidence in one Case, which they admit in another, we must take the Liberty to accuse them of not having examined so fairly and impartially as they might have done.

From what has been here observed, we may perhaps be able to set our Author right in several things he seems at a Loss to account for. ^c He imagines it *absurd to require a Belief, if previous Examination be requisite*. I should rather have thought it *absurd to require a Belief without previous Examination*. But surely Men may reasonably be called upon to hearken and attend to the Proofs of a divine Revelation. They may be required to divest themselves of all unreasonable Passions and sinful Prejudices, and impartially to examine and weigh the Evidence by which it is supported.

^d But *Conviction* (says our Author) *cannot be ensured, if Examination is allowed; and therefore cannot, with any Propriety, be insisted on*. In plain Cases I humbly presume, that nothing more is required to *ensure Conviction*, than only a common Capacity, and an honest Heart. *But all Men's Capacities are not alike: ^e Few Men are qualified for reasoning at all; ^f and the ablest and best of Men are disqualified for fair reasoning by their natural Prejudices*. But there are some Degrees of Evidence, which we pre-

^c Pag. 5.

^d Ibid.

^e P. 17.

^f P. 23.

sume every one, whom we admit within the Character of a reasonable Nature, is able to perceive; and we hope to shew, that the Evidences of the Gospel are, at the same time, adapted to common Capacities; and yet such as the most knowing and learned can find no just Exceptions to. Besides, ^g *the great Command to believe*, is not so *peremptory and absolute*, as this Writer pretends. The Gospel does not require Belief so *absolutely*, as to make no Allowances, and leave no Exceptions in Favour of those, who are under a natural Incapacity of receiving and understanding the Proofs of it. Let us hear what our Saviour himself says: ^h *If ye were blind, ye should have no Sin: But now ye say, We see; therefore your Sin remaineth.* A Sentence which it may concern those Gentlemen to consider, who are pleased to dignify and distinguish themselves by the Title of *Free-thinkers*.

Again, from what has been said we may possibly be able to conceive how Faith may be a Virtue, or Duty, entitled to Commendation or Reward. Where there is Liberty, there may be Virtue. If then we are in any measure free in the Use and Direction of those Faculties on which our Assent depends, 'tis plain we may deserve Commendation for making a right Use of our Faculties, and may be blame-worthy for misapplying them.

^g Pag. 23.

^h John ix. 41.

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We do not affirm, that there is any Virtue in Credulity, or any Merit in believing on little or no Evidence. But surely we may have Leave to say, that the Love of Truth is a commendable Quality; that an honest Mind, free from all sinful Prejudices, disposed to give the Truth a fair Examination; and, after such Examination, willing to receive it, may be acceptable in the Sight of God. And this is more especially true with regard to religious and moral Truths. If a Man is unwilling to receive such Truths, it is generally owing to some vicious Habit of Mind; but the worthy and virtuous Man comes, with all the Preparation that Truth requires, ready to receive it, without Prejudice or Partiality.

This Love of Virtue, this ready Disposition to receive the Truth, is what the Scripture every where speaks of with Commendation. ⁱ We read that the Inhabitants of *Berea* were more noble than those in *Thessalonica*, in that they received the Word with all Readiness of Mind; and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those Things were so. ^k If a Man will do the Will of God (saith our Saviour) he shall know of the Doctrine, whether it be of God. Again, ^l My Sheep hear my Voice. ^m He that doth Truth, cometh to the Light. ⁿ He that is of God, heareth God's Words.

ⁱ Acts xvii. 11.

^k John vii. 17.

^l Ib. x. 27.

^m Ib. iii. 21.

ⁿ Ib. viii. 47.

° Every Man that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me. And p no Man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father. ° For this Reason our Saviour requires us to receive the Kingdom of God as a little Child. ° And his Apostle calls upon us to lay apart all Filthiness and Superfluity of Naughtiness, and receive with Meekness the engrafted Word, which is able to save our Souls. And for the same Reason ° those who believed not the Truth, are represented to be such as had Pleasure in Unrighteousness, and received not the Love of the Truth, that they might be saved. With the greatest Propriety of Language therefore do the Scriptures speak, when they describe Men as ° understanding with their Hearts, — ° believing with their Hearts; — when they talk of ° purifying our Hearts by Faith; — when they tell us of Atheists, and wicked Men, that ° their foolish Heart was darkened; that ° their Understanding was darkened; they being alienated from the Life of God, through the Ignorance that was in them, because of the Blindness of their Heart. These Expressions were perhaps designed to be descriptive of the Will; but does it therefore follow, that the Gospel makes no Appeal to our

° John vi. 45.

p Ib. vi. 65.

° Mark x. 15.

° James i. 21.

° 2 Thess ii. 10, 12.

° Matth. xiii. 15.

° Rom. x. 10.

° Acts xv. 9.

° Rom. i. 21.

° Eph. iv. 18.

Understanding? I hope the Will and the Understanding may act amicably together; and Reason and Virtue both join in confirming us in the Faith.

Again, we may from hence be able to comprehend what our Saviour means, when he says, — ^z *Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.* Our Saviour did not hereby design to encourage a *forward Propensity to assent* without Proof or Enquiry; or to teach us there was any *Merit* in being convinced without sufficient *Evidence*. He does not say, *Blessed are the credulous*; but — *Blessed are they who believe*, when sufficient Proof is offered them, and are not so unreasonable as to require more than is sufficient. The Case indeed is no more than this: Let us suppose two Persons, one strongly prejudiced against the Truth, the other free from such Prejudices. This last, on reasonable Proof, believes the Truth; the first still stands out. But God is pleased, in his Goodness, to lay still farther Proof before him; such as shall overcome his unreasonable Prejudices. Thus they both become Believers; but which best deserves the *Blessing*, I leave any Man to judge.

But what our Author seems chiefly to insist on, is, that no ^a *Propositions can be tendered to our Reason with Penalties annexed, and under the Restraints of Threats and Autho-*

^z John xx. 9.

^a Pag. 8.

city, ^b that (except on his own Scheme) there can be no *possible Connection in Nature betwixt Conscience and Believing*; that *human Invention cannot find an equal Image to express the Absurdity of an obedient or criminal Understanding*. But I hope it will appear from what has been said, that there may be *a Connection betwixt Conscience and Believing*. ^c It has been shewn, that Men are not wholly passive in believing or disbelieving, but have a great Compass of Liberty in the use of those Faculties, on which our Assent depends. So far then as this Liberty reaches, it is a voluntary Act, and therefore naturally subject to a Law, for the Transgression of which we are accountable to God. And since the Obligation and Penalties of this Law must rise in Proportion to the moral Importance of the Subject proposed to us, and since no Subject can be of greater Importance, than the Truth of a Revelation, which is to be the Rule of our Actions, and the Measure of our Duty, it follows that to act contrary to the Laws of Reason in this Enquiry must be a high Offence against God. If we dismiss the Proposal of it without due Attention; if we resist sufficient Evidence, and such as it was in our Power by a right Use of our Faculties to have perceived; but, above all, if we suffer any Lusts, or immo-

² P. 64. ^c See Dr. Rogers on the Necessity of divine Revelation, p. 203, &c.

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ral Prejudices to obstruct or overbear such Evidence, and in such an Enquiry, this is, even in the Accounts of Nature, the greatest Crime we can be guilty of in the Exercise of these Faculties, and consequently such as must expose us to the highest Resentment of God, and subject us to the severest Penalties. The very Supposition of a divine Revelation carries with it an Obligation to attend to it; and if its Evidences are sufficient to convince any reasonable Man, it will follow that every reasonable Man is in Duty bound to receive it: If God therefore sends a Messenger with full and plain Credentials, he may require us to receive him. This Gentleman may, if he pleases, put on his Airs of Insolence, and call this ^d *Nonsense*, and *ridiculous Fargon*. But pray let me ask him, whether Ignorance will excuse the Neglect of plain Laws? Whether if a Judge came with a Commission from the King, he might not require his Majesty's Subjects to give Credit to him, and believe the Attestation of the Broad Seal? And whether he might not lawfully punish those who should take upon them to question his Authority? According to our Author he must not. ^e *The commanding Men to believe rationally, and this with threatned Imputation of Guilt and Infliction of Punishment is such a Scheme at first View, as no Pretence of Authority, human or divine,*

^d See p. 64.

• Ib.

can command any Regard or Attention to, or indeed any Notice, but that of the Contempt due to Paradoxes the most eminently impudent and Ridiculous—Very magisterial indeed—This is in other Words—*Ipse dixi*—and he is an impudent Blockhead who shall presume to contradict me. But I fancy this Judge, we have been just now making a Supposition of, would teach this Gentleman another Lesson. He would probably think it by no means unreasonable to command Men to believe, what no reasonable Man could deny; he might call him, who should say otherwise *most eminently Impudent*, and would perhaps soon make him *most eminently Ridiculous*. Why then may not God Almighty require Rational Beings to make use of their Reason? Why may he not punish Men for wilful Obstinacy, or criminal Negligence? But if our Author thinks 'tis absurd to talk of an obedient or criminal Understanding, he must take the Absurdity to himself, who first, I believe, put those Terms of Expression together. Unbelievers very well know we lay no Charge against their Understanding; but against them, for not making a right Use of their Understanding. The Proverb tells us, *there are none so deaf, as those who wont hear*: But in such Case we don't call the Ear criminal, but the Man, who stops his Ears. ^f *Disbelieving*

^f Ib.

therefore, *and Guilt* (to use our Author's own Words) *may have a Meaning when put together, since the Compliance requir'd is no longer that of the Understanding, but of the Will, in its Nature free, and therefore accountable : And though we are not by any Means chargeable for the Effects of our Apprehension, yet there is no Reason, but that we may be with all Justice called to the strictest Account for our Obstinacy, Impiety, and Perverseness.* If then Unbelievers shut their Eyes against the Truth ; but especially if they suffer vicious Prejudices, to suppress the Evidence offered for it, then in this Author's own Account their Condemnation is just. But 'tis on this very Supposition *the Gospel-Threats and Penalties are founded.* *He that believeth not, is condemned* (saith our Saviour ;) *and this is the Condemnation, that Light came into the World, and Men loved Darkness rather than Light, because their Deeds were Evil.*

CH A P. II.

HAVING thus premised what may be necessary to state the Case in Dispute, we may come the better prepared to examine into our Author's Reasonings on this Subject.

^a Joh. iii. 18, 19.

^h One of his chief Arguments is, that it is *absurd to require a Belief, if previous Examination be requisite*—But this, I hope, has been already sufficiently considered. ⁱ Every Argument indeed we maintain is an Appeal to Mens Judgments; and supposes the Persons we argue with both capable of Understanding plain Proof, and obliged to submit to it. Do we not all of us, in our Disputes one with another, expect Men should be determined by Reason? And are we not very ready to accuse and reprove one another for not hearkening to Reason? Whether we will confess it of ourselves, or no, we all of us will blame other Men for assenting or dissenting without due Examination; for suffering Prejudices, or Passions, to obscure the Evidence of Truth, or divert them from attending to it. Is not this the common Sense of Mankind? And does not this plainly suppose, that Men may in some Cases *be allowed and required to examine*, and yet *obliged to believe*. To suppose otherwise, is to suppose either that we are not accountable to God for the Use of our Faculties, or that there is no Truth so plain, as that Men may, by the due Use of their Faculties, be capable of perceiving it; the former seems to border upon Atheism; the latter is no better than downright Scepticism. We have just now

^h P. 5. ⁱ See Dr. Rogers on the Necessity of divine Revelation, p. 203, &c.

seen our Author himself exclaiming most heavily against Men for maintaining *Absurdities* and *Paradoxes*, most eminently *impudent* and *ridiculous*. But *Impudence* is an *Expression* evidently *descriptive* of the *Will*: So then, in this Author's own Account, Men may be to blame for believing *Absurdities*; there is therefore plainly a *Connection* betwixt *Conscience* and *Believing*. But perhaps some Men may be so *impudent* as to maintain such *ridiculous Paradoxes*, as neither they themselves, nor any Man alive can believe: It follows then that there are some Truths so plain as that no reasonable Man can be supposed to refuse his Assent to them. These surely then Men may be expected, and *required* to *believe*; and yet, I suppose, they may have the Liberty of *examining* them.—^k But to *offer to sit down to examine*, seems to our Author to be *absolutely giving up the Cause of Religion*; and *desiring him to dispute, to be begging the Question*.—I must own it seems to me quite otherwise: I should have thought that he, who *sits down to examine*, thereby declares that he does not *give up the Cause*; and that the very Notion of a *Dispute* implies that *the Question* is on Foot, and not *begged* either way.—But we must, it seems, beware of *examining*. ^l *To examine is to doubt*, ^m and implies a *Suspence of Conviction*. ⁿ But this is *rank Infidelity*, and ^o amounts to

^k P. 5.^l P. 5.^m P. 12.ⁿ P. 6.^o P. 12.

a *peremptory and impious Denial*. However it is at least a *temporary Disbelief*.—But we cannot admit of either of these Assertions without better Proof, neither does *Examination* always imply *doubting*; nor does every *doubt* make a Man an Infidel. May not a Man *examine*, and that very carefully and impartially, into what he never made the least *Doubt* of? Or must a Man *doubt* of every Proposition in *Euclid*, before he examines the Demonstration of it? May not a Person skilled in the practical Part of Navigation look into, and canvas thoroughly the Demonstrations on which it is founded, without *doubting* of the Truth of those Rules which he already knows by Experience to be true? ^p This would be a *strange Method* indeed! to turn ones back upon Science in order to meet it, to discard it as a Means to commence Acquaintance. Reason requires no such Scepticism, either in Philosophy or Religion. A Person educated in the Belief of a God, and in the Principles of Virtue and Honour, may, I hope, *examine* into these Principles, without ever *renouncing* them, or entertaining any doubt about their Truth; and one who has been brought up in the Christian Religion, may enquire into the Truth of his Profession, though he never found any Reason to *doubt* of it. ^q But there is no Medium betwixt believing and not believing.—Very true—but

^p See p. 6. ^q P. 5.

neither is every *Doubt* inconsistent with *Belief*: Nor does a *Suspension of Belief* amount to a *peremptory and impious Denial*. There are many Facts in History, which I believe, because well attested; many Propositions in Philosophy, which I assent to upon good Grounds; but yet there may be some Difficulties and Objections, which I am not able to give a satisfactory Answer to, which leave upon my Mind some *Doubt*, more or less. Again there are some Cases, where the Proofs appear pretty equal on either Side; and here I am forc'd to suspend my Assent: As I can neither positively affirm, so neither do I *peremptorily deny*. To apply this then to the Case of Religion.—A Person who has been educated in the Principles of Christianity, may perhaps meet with Objections, which may in some Degree stagger his Faith, and make him doubt of the Truth of those Things he has been taught. But no sober Man, I hope, will say, that such Doubts are always criminal; all we desire of such a Person, is, to examine impartially into the Merits of the Cause, and to look into the Answers which have been given to such Objections; and then we hope he will soon learn to despise them. But should such *Doubts* arise so high, as to amount even to a *temporary Disbelief*, yet we do not call this a *peremptory and impious Denial*, nor pronounce the Man ^r an *Apostate*,

^r See pag. 6.

or *Anti-Christ* profess. We still hope that a serious and impartial Enquiry will set him right again.

*But if Doubting be one Moment allowable, (says our Author) who shall ascertain the precise Time for summing up the Evidence and pronouncing Sentence! Who shall take upon him to settle the last lawful Point of Hesitation? To determine the critical Point, when longer Want of Conviction becomes criminal, or settle the competent Time we ought to be satisfied in. — Curious Reasoning indeed! It may be allowable for a Man to doubt of the Truth of his Religion: Therefore he may doubt as long as he lives, never examine into the Evidences of it, nor be satisfied with any that offers. We ought to take Time to consider what Business, or Profession we will apply ourselves to; therefore we may consider all our Life long, and never apply ourselves to any Thing. A Judge may take Time to examine into the Merits of a Cause; therefore he may continue examining into it for ever, and never determine it. — But who shall ascertain the precise Time for pronouncing Sentence? — That, Sir, we must leave to your own Conscience to determine. Take what Time you please; if God and your own Heart condemn you not, neither do we. But we must take the Freedom to tell you, that, *God is not to be mock'd.**

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Religion is a serious Thing; and he requires you to be serious in it. He will allow you Time for a free Enquiry, but he expects you should deal fairly and impartially with your own Heart, and not trifle for ever in an Affair of this Importance.

It were to be wish'd you had consider'd that your whole Argument strikes at Natural Religion, as well as Reveal'd. — * If Natural Religion admit at all of Examination, it must Necessarily (on your Principles) admit likewise of (at least a temporary) Disbelief. The Rational Theist, whoever he be, must of course have originally set out a Sceptick, and hesitated for a Time, even whether there were a God or no. † If the Motives to the Belief of a God may be once innocently propos'd to Examination, they may possibly be innocently rejected too. Horrid Consequence this! but 'tis your own, Sir.

‡ But we are told that our Saviour has expressly assur'd us, that he looks upon a Seeker as Anti-Christ profess. — I never yet heard this reckon'd among the Marks of Anti-christ; nor can I find any such Doctrine throughout the Gospel. — Yes, says our Author, Our Saviour tells us, § that he that is not with him is against him. — But this Gentleman should first have been sure that Christ speaks this of himself; he should for his own Sake have taken a little Care, how he attributed to our

* Page 12. † P. 93. ‡ P. 6. § Matt. xii. 30.

Saviour, what is really spoken of the Devil:
^bFor so the best Commentators understand it.
 The *Pharisees* had attributed a Miracle wrought by our Saviour to the Power of the Devil. To this he replies—Whatever is done by Confederacy with *Satan*, must be something that promotes the Interest of his Kingdom, and not any Thing directly contrary thereto; it could not therefore be suppos'd that *Satan should cast out Satan*. Then it follows—*He that is not with me, is against me*; which is generally suppos'd to be a proverbial Expression, designed to illustrate and confirm what went before.—If when two great Powers are at open and irreconcilable Enmity against each other, even he, who only forbears joining with one Side, is usually reputed to be against it, according to the known Proverb—*He that is not with me, is against me*,—how much more ought I, who never took Part with Satan, and never did any Thing in the least to promote his Interest, to be reputed his Enemy? how little Reason is there to charge me of being in Confederacy with him? Our Saviour does not then speak here of himself; he only quotes a proverbial Expression, and applies it not to himself, but to Satan. When he speaks of himself, he uses quite a different Language: ^c *He that is not against us, is for us*.

^b See *Grotius, Hammond, Chrysostom, Dr. Clarke*, Vol. 6. Sermon. 1.
^c Luke ix. 50.

^d Our Author enters now more professedly on the Proof of his Point, and this he undertakes to make out, First, *from the Nature of Reason and Religion*. Secondly, *from the Account given us in Holy Scripture*; and then Thirdly, *he is from the same indisputable Authority to ascertain the proper and prescribed Means to come at the Knowledge of Divine Truths*. I shall follow him in his own Method.

^e *In the first Place then, he asks, Can it be by the Exercise of their Reason that Men can be required to think all alike?*—But what does he mean by *thinking all alike*? Does he mean *thinking alike* in all things? The Gospel requires no such thing. No Church upon Earth requires it. Even the Church of Rome allows some *Latitude of thinking*, and has an *Infinity of Sects*, which continue uncensured within her Bosom. Besides the Point in Dispute is only about one thing—the Truth of the Christian Religion. The whole Question between us is, Whether Christianity is founded on Argument? Whether Men may not be required to *think alike* in this one Point? What then will our Author say, that Men can never in any one thing whatsoever be required to *think alike*? Can nothing be so plain as that all Men of common Capacities may be presumed to know it? Not only *the youngest Pupil of Philosophy*,

but the youngest Boy at School will laugh at *such a Proposition*. * Our Author elsewhere seems to ridicule the Folly of attempting to *make Men see all alike*; and tells us, that *the only Method in Nature* to do this is to *put out their Eyes*. I willingly accept his Comparison, and though it cannot be expected that all Men should have the same Clearness of Sight, yet I presume there may be some things which all Men, who have any Eyes at all, may be expected and required to see. When the Sun shines in its full Strength, it may reasonably be expected that all Men should call it Day; and if any Club of Men should shut themselves up in a dark Room and vote it to be Night, they would, I believe, expose themselves both to Laughter and Censure. I may make a farther Use of this apt Comparison our Author has furnish'd me with, to illustrate what has before been said of the Freedom of Assent. The Eye, as well as the Understanding, may in some Instances be merely Passive. The Light may sometimes force itself upon us, whether we will or no; nor can we always avoid seeing such Objects as present themselves before us. But yet it must be allowed that we have no small Compass of Freedom in the Use and Exercise of this Faculty of Sight. We can shut our Eyes when we will; we can turn them towards or from any Object, as we

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please, and may deserve either Blame or Commendation in so doing. Every Parent, Master or Tutor, expects that those under his Care should make a proper Use of their Eyes, and will chastise them for looking where they should not, and not looking where they should. The like Freedom, I apprehend, we have in the Use of our Understanding, and indeed of all our Faculties. But to return: With regard to the Proofs of Religion, I humbly presume that God is able to give such Evidences of a Revelation, as shall satisfy every reasonable Man, and I hope hereafter to shew he has actually given us such of the Christian Revelation. If this be the Case, it may very reasonably be expected that God will require Men to receive such a Revelation, and will punish them, if, through Obstinacy and unreasonable Prejudices, they reject it. Again, with Regard to the particular Doctrines of the Gospel, there may be some so plain, that all Christians may be expected to understand and believe them; some so necessarily connected with the very Foundations of the Christian Covenant, that a Man cannot deny them, without denying in Effect the whole Gospel. If in such Cases then all Men of common Capacities may be *requir'd to think alike*, there will, I hope, be still *Latitude* enough left for Men to abound in their own Opinions. And yet even in these Cases, I doubt not but God will make

all reasonable Allowances for those who err in the Integrity of their Hearts and will not condemn any Man for Ignorance when he had little or no Opportunity of knowing better.

† What our Author urges in the next Place, of *the Absurdity of propounding Questions to our Reason under the Restraints of Threats and Authority*, § has been already consider'd. It has been shewn that Belief may reasonably be requir'd of us; that Men may be punishable for not hearkening to Reason, for not making a right Use of their Understanding. If Punishment therefore may be justly inflicted on such Men, it may be justly threaten'd too. These *Threatnings* indeed proceed on a Supposition that the Gospel is supported by sufficient Evidences, and that Men, if they are not wanting to themselves, may perceive the Truth of it; but if there are any under a natural Incapacity of receiving it, these *Threats* (as I apprehend) were never design'd to extend to them. The *Penalties annex'd* need not therefore any way prejudice the Freedom of our Enquiry. The sincere and virtuous Man, who will examine carefully and impartially, need not fear any *Danger in his Decisions*: The *Rod* is prepar'd only for the idle and naughty Boy, not him who *cannot*, but him *who will not* learn his

† Page 8.

§ See before p. 25.

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Lesson; and Tophet is ordained for those,^a who receive not the Love of the Truth, that they might be saved.

But we are told, — ^b *that the great Command to Believe is peremptory and absolute; no Conditions in the Case, that we shall believe if we have Time, if we have Abilities; —^c no Provision made for sincere Infidelity, as a possible Consequence of a fair Enquiry into the Merits of Religion; — no Exceptions or Allowances whatsoever for any professing to have used all possible Means of Information, and remaining still dissatisfied. — Not to insist, that Professions may be insincere; pray, how does he prove what he so roundly and confidently asserts? He refers to Mark xvi. 16. where our Saviour expressly says: He that believeth not, shall be damned. — But I ask again, what Authority has he to say, this Threatning admits of no Exceptions or Allowances? It relates immediately to those Persons only to whom the Apostles preached; ^d the Lord working with them, and confirming the Word with Signs following; and cannot, with any Reason, be extended any farther than to those, who, like them, have received sufficient Evidence of the Truth. Those, who stand out against Conviction, may justly be punished; and*

^a 2 Thess. ii. 10.

^b P. 23.

^c P. 117.

^d Ver. 20.

yet Allowances made for those, who want either Opportunities or Ability to judge.

‘ But this Gentleman will not allow us to pronounce *so tenderly upon the Case of invincible Ignorance. What is this but directly licensing a Dissent from the Gospel, wherever its Evidences may happen not to obtain; and stamping an equal Mark of necessary Truth upon a thousand opposite Opinions.* — Very good! Whatever is tolerated is, it seems, *licensed* and established; and Error, if suffered to pass unpunished, instantly becomes *a necessary Truth.* Exceptions destroy the Rule, and equitable Allowances abrogate the Law.

§ But if *invincible Ignorance be a Plea ever to be tolerated, what are become, in the mean time, of all the Privileges of the Pale?* — I hope this Gentleman will pardon me, if I have made too liberal Concessions in favour of sincere Infidelity: I must own I am not so jealous of *the Privileges of the Pale*, as this *most orthodox Writer* would represent himself. I cannot take upon me to consign over to inevitable Damnation all, who are without this *Pale.* But what then? Do I ^h *acknowledge an equal Merit in the Opposition?* Do I suppose them entitled to the same Rewards? God may make different Men capable of different Degrees of Happiness. He may make abundant Allowances

^f Pag. 44.

^g Ibid.

^h See p. 45.

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for those, who ⁱ labour under the insuperable Incapacity of a particular infidel — Make (as our Author ingeniously expresses it) and yet the sincere Christian may, in many Respects, have the Advantage of them. Those who err in the Integrity of their Heart, may be accepted; but it does not follow from hence, that they are intitled to the Promises of the Gospel, or that they will be equally rewarded with God's chosen Flock. We know, that he has promised ^k *an exceeding and eternal Weight of Glory* to us, who are within his Covenant; but what he has prepared for them, who are without the *Pale*, we presume not to determine.

But farther, if we were to suppose the *sincere Unbeliever*, who lives according to the best of his Knowledge, to be entitled to an equal Reward with the Christian, who lives according to the Rules of the Gospel; yet surely 'tis of no small Advantage to live under the Influence of so great a Light, and such engaging Motives to Holiness. The stronger are our Motives, the more likely we are to be affected by them; and the greater the Light is, which is set before us, so much the more easy it is to follow its Guidance. Supposing then the same Rewards laid up for the virtuous Unbeliever and good Christian; yet the one is in a fairer Way of

ⁱ Pag. 45.

^k 2 Cor. iv. 17.

obtaining those Rewards, and in much less Danger of miscarrying than the other is.

Lastly, Could we suppose them both on the same Footing in this respect too; yet it must afford us no small Comfort and Satisfaction of Mind to have a clear Prospect, and firm Assurance of these Rewards. While the Unbeliever lives in a State of Uncertainty and Anxiety, full of gloomy Apprehensions, and uneasy Forebodings, ¹ *having no Hope, and without God in the World*, the good Christian's *Hope is full of Immortality*. It is no small Privilege to be assured of the Favour of God, the Pardon of our Sins, and eternal Life; from hence must arise Peace and Joy *unspeakable*. This must sweeten all our Labours, make Prosperity joyful, Adversity supportable, Life easy, and Death comfortable.

^m Our Author could not well have chosen a more proper Instance for our purpose than that of St. Paul. ⁿ He tells us, *that he obtained Mercy, because* what he did, was done *ignorantly in Unbelief*: But he never tells us, that *the Zeal of Saul the Persecutor was equally meritorious with that of Paul the Apostle*. On the contrary, he calls himself *the chief of Sinners, because he persecuted the Church of God*. He often laments his for-

¹ Eph. ii. 12.

^m See p. 46. , ⁿ 1 Tim. i. 13.

^e 1 Tim. i. 14, 15. 1 Cor. xv. 9.

mer Conduct with the deepest Contrition; and, with Thankfulness, acknowledges the *exceeding abundant Grace* of God towards him. He tells us, ^p *he counted all things but Loss for the Excellency of the Knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord.*

We may have then a just Notion of the Excellency of the Gospel, and *the Privileges of the Pale*, without pronouncing so severely on *the Case of invincible Ignorance*. Let this Writer then forbear to censure our *Moderation*; let him not attempt to set aside this only Plea the Unbeliever will be able to make in the great Day of Examination. ^a Let him, however, not pretend to scoff at God's Sentence in that Day, lest *he* meet with a quite different Reception; lest his Doom be — ^b *Out of thine own Mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked Servant.*

What our Author has advanced with regard to the baptizing and educating of Children, may come more properly to be considered in another Place. I shall proceed now to examine what he says *Page 10*, where he tells us, that ^c *we are to pray for Encrease of our Faith*, which, he would persuade us, is a Proof, that our Faith is no rational Assent. These Words are in *Italick* Characters; but what he would refer to, I cannot

^a Phil. iii. 8.

^a P. 45.

^b Luke xix. 22.

^c P. 10.

easily find. ^d The Expression is in Scripture; but by *Faith* is there plainly meant, not the Belief of the Gospel, but Trust and Confidence in God, a Persuasion of his Assistance in working Miracles. But suppose it our Duty to *pray for the Encrease and Confirmation of our Faith*; what then? — ^e *If Prayer* (says our Author) *be the effectual Means proposed for the attaining the Perfection of our Faith, there is a strong Presumption too, that our Labours of every other kind were to be spared throughout the whole Progress.* — *A strong Presumption indeed.* — Christ has taught us to *pray for God's Assistance against Temptation*; are we then to use no Care or Labour of our own? He hath commanded us to *pray for our daily Bread*; I suppose therefore *our Labours, of every other kind, are to be spared, and our Bread is to drop into our Mouths by Methods purely divine, and without any of our Assistance.* — ^f But it appears (we are told) *from this manner of cultivating our Faith, that Reason was to have originally no Share in making the Graft.* — This Gentleman is peculiarly happy in his Comparisons. Pray (let me ask him) what would become of his *Graft*, if God did not shower down a Blessing from Heaven upon it. The Husbandman may *plant and water*; but it is God

^d Luke xvii. 5.

^e P. 10.

^f Ibid.

that giveth the Encrease. But is it possible we can conceive how Reason can ever found such a Faith as Grace can second, or add to? Or, that a Rational Faith should be afterward superseded, or confirmed by an irrational one. — This Gentleman seems to suppose a Man, first to attain Faith without any Assistance of God; and then God to infuse a new Degree of Faith into him without any Concurrence of his own. But all this is purely our Author's own Invention. We suppose the Man all along to make use of his Reason, and God to assist him all along in the Use of it. Both the Beginning therefore, and *Encrease of his Faith*, is *rational*, and yet neither obtained without the divine Assistance. Suppose a Man should pray to God, to give him a prosperous Voyage in Trade; does he expect God should do this without any Concurrence of his own? Is it not sufficient, that he prosper him in the Use of natural Means? And may not both the bottom he sets out upon, and the Riches he brings home, at the same time be said to be attained by his own Industry, and yet owing to the Blessing of God; or (to use our Author's own Comparison) does not the Blessing of God go all along with the Care and Labour of the Husbandman? Who made

§ 'Tis in the Original — *an irrational one to be afterwards superseded, or even confirmed by a rational one; —* but this is, I suppose, an Error of the Press.

the Cyon to shoot? Who taught the Stock to receive and naturalize it? Who, after its Infision, gives it its Growth and Encrease?

^s But *Encrease of Evidence* (we are told) is the only *Accession to be made to a rational Persuasion*; but we cannot allow it to be the only one. *The Evidence* will *encrease* in vain, if Men are not capable of understanding it, willing to listen to it, and disposed to give it its due Weight. On the other Hand, *the Evidence* may continue the same, and yet a *rational Persuasion* may be either produced or confirmed by enlarging the Understanding, or rectifying the Heart.

^h But, it seems, we *pray* also, that God would *confirm and continue us stedfast in the Faith*. — I am not so much concerned with what our Author here advances. It affects, I think, only an Expression or two in our *Liturgy*: Perhaps the Governors of our Church may be willing to strike out these Expressions, if this Gentleman can satisfy them, that nothing but good Reason can ever shake our *Stedfastness*. But if Self-interest, vicious Affections, a Lightness and Fickleness of Temper, Fear of Reproach or Persecution, may overthrow the Faith of some, they may possibly think it necessary to *pray*, that God would *keep us stedfast*, and prevent our being shaken by such Motives as

these. But they desire not those, who use these Prayers, to stop their Ears against the Voice of Reason. We do not hereby preclude ourselves from all further Enquiries, or from giving any Objection that offers, a fair Hearing: We may be so far established in the Faith, as not to be *carried about with every Wind of Doctrine*; and yet not so blindly and foolishly obstinate to a present Notion, as to *disavow all future Use of our Reason*.

^b But the Scripture itself, it seems, *requires this irrevocable Constancy in our Profession, this utter Deafness to all farther Solicitation for Discipleship*. ^c *We are warned, though even an Angel from Heaven, were to preach any new Doctrine to us, to give not the least Heed or Credit to his Pretensions*. — But what then? Because we must not hearken to any, the highest Authority, against Reason; must we therefore not hearken to Reason itself? I humbly apprehend, that any of *Reason's Assurances will falsify and confront such a Preacher*. We are not to give Credit to any one, though he pretend to be an Angel *from Heaven*, if he teach any thing contrary to plain Reason, or to a prior Revelation well attested; because the same thing cannot be both true and false, and because God cannot contradict

^b Pag. 11.^c Gal. i. 8.

himself.

himself. But if an Angel, or any the meanest Man, offers me Reasons against my present Persuasion, the Scripture no where debars me from hearing and considering them. What follows I cannot possibly make Sense of, — *What is there that the Nature of any external Evidence can possibly afford us, that has not more than a Balance in such an Authority?* — Is not the Appearance of an Angel itself external Evidence? What Authority then can any Angel bring with him, that is so superior to all external Evidence? The many Miracles St. Paul had wrought, were surely sufficient to overbalance any supposed Appearance of an Angel. After he had given such full Proof of his Ministry, he might well assert with Confidence, that nothing could be offered to overthrow a Doctrine so excellent in itself, and so well attested.

^a Another Objection against using our Understanding in Matters of Religion, is, that it will *take up too much Time, and our Determinations will probably come too late to answer the End for which they were designed, — to influence our Actions, and direct our Conduct through Life.* — But this Gentleman again forgets, that, whilst he is aiming at revealed Religion, he really strikes at all natural Religion. The Heathen knew nothing

of divine Inspiration, had they then no Rule of Life? Must they be for ever debating on *eternal Relations, and moral Differences of Things?* ^b And had they no Tie upon them to respect the Authority of the Law of Nature; no Inducement to pay it any Degrees of Obedience or Conformity in their Practice, 'till it had gained a sufficient Establishment and Root in their Opinion? And yet a great many Enquiries were then necessary, which we have now less Occasion to enter upon. Every Branch of the Law of Nature was to be proved by Reason, and established upon its proper Principles. This was a Labour, which the generality of Mankind had neither Capacity nor Time to go through with. But the Gospel has excused us from the Necessity of such tedious Enquiries. The Proof of the Christian Religion itself is the chief thing necessary for us to examine; and this, as I apprehend, lies within a narrow Compass. When this is once settled, all other things, necessary for us to know, may easily be learnt from the Gospel. 'Tis one singular Advantage of the Christian Religion, that it has made *the Way of Holiness* and Happiness plain and obvious to the meanest Capacities: — ^c *The way-faring Men, though Fools, shall not err therein.* So that our Author's Argument, if it proves any thing, proves the Necessity of a Revelation.

^b See p. 15.^c Isai. xxxv. 8.

He lays down, indeed, Suppositions that have no Foundation in Nature; no Wonder then that his Conclusions are wild and extravagant. He first supposes, that it will take up a great deal of Time, even a Man's whole Life, to enquire into the Truth of Christianity: But I hope soon to shew, that this is not a Work of so much Difficulty as this Writer would represent: Next, he supposes the Person enquiring to continue in a State of Infidelity all the Time this Enquiry lasts: But this is again without Foundation. Must we renounce all Principles before we examine into them? Must we turn Atheists before we enquire into the Proofs of God's Existence? Neither Reason, nor Religion require or allow such a Procedure. All the Indifference, or *Neutrality*, that Philosophy requires, is, to divest ourselves of all unreasonable Prejudices, not to interest ourselves on either Side of the Question, but to be equally ready to embrace the Truth wherever we find it. But it is by no Means necessary to ^a *shake Hands with all we have been taught*, and divest ourselves of all ^b *No-tions of Right and Wrong*. Such a visionary Scheme cannot indeed possibly take place in Nature. Every Man, when he comes to the Use of his Reason, finds himself already engaged in Favour of some Set of Principles.

^a See p. 4.

^b P. 15.

It cannot be otherwise; the Mind cannot lie fallow so long. Prejudices and Prepossessions, either good or evil, will find Admittance in our tender Years. When afterwards our Reason comes to Maturity, and we begin to examine into the Truth of *Opinions contracted by Education, and made sacred by Habit*, is it reasonable or possible to renounce those Opinions before our Examination begins? No Man, I believe, ever does, or can act in this manner. We generally first enquire, and then begin to suspect, or disbelieve, when we find Reason so to do, when our Enquiry is finished, or at least well advanced. Again, in Matters of Practice, are *our Actions under no Direction or Restraint*, while we are enquiring into the Grounds and Reasons of our *Obligations*? Must we lay aside the Worship of God, while we are debating on the Proofs of his Being and Attributes? Must we pay no *Degree of Obedience or Conformity* to the Law of Nature, whilst the Principles of it are under our Examination? The Account therefore our Author gives us of *his doubting Disciple*, is merely imaginary. The Picture may be well drawn; but it bears Resemblance to no Man living.

Let us then next suppose a Person educated in the Principles of Christianity. It is his Duty when he grows up, to examine into the

† See p. 15.

Truth of what he has been taught, as far as his Abilities and Opportunities will permit. But he need not therefore either renounce or even doubt of his Religion, much less is he to forbear the Practice of it. He wants not all this while a *Rule to influence his Actions, and direct his Conduct*; a *Monitor* to controul his *Passions*. ^a *His Armour* was fitted to him from his Infancy; and he need not throw it off in order to prove it. ^b He had a *Wedding-Garment* provided for him, as soon as he was born; and he need not strip himself naked, before he can know whether his Dress is fit and proper to *appear* in. He may seriously and impartially examine into the Proofs of his Religion, without apostatizing from it. He may be ready to give all Objections a fair hearing, be resolved to embrace the Truth, wherever he finds it, and willing to renounce his Religion when he finds it to be false, but not before. Should therefore *Death in this Interim surprize him*, it will not find him an *Infidel*, nor overtake him unprepar'd, or unfurnish'd of his *Passport*. He is all this while doing his Duty; and need not doubt of Acceptance with God, whether he lives, or dies, during the Enquiry. Besides it must be remember'd that this Person whom we suppose enquiring into the Truth of Christianity, is all the while possess'd of the Prin-

^a See p. 14.

^b See p. 17.

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ciples of natural Religion. Could we therefore suppose the Precepts and Motives of the Gospel to have no Influence on him during *this Interim*, are his *Actions* therefore under no *Direction or Restraint*? Have Infidels no Rule ^c to *influence their Actions or direct their Conduct*? Are they all of them involv'd in the most horrible Degrees of Guilt, and lost in the Power of Habit beyond Recovery? This *doubting Disciple* is surely under the Obligations of the Law of Nature. He has within him *a Sage Counsellor*, a faithful *Monitor*, to teach him his Duty, and warn him of the Folly and Danger of Vice. If therefore he suffers the *Powers of Darkneſs* and his own corrupt *Dispositions* to gain Ground, if the *Habits of Vice* take deep Root, he cannot plead *Innocence*, nor want of *early Intelligence and better Information*.

^d But our Author ſeems to conceive ſomething abſtractedly of a neceſſary Qualification in a true *Faith*, ſomething of a meritorious Nature in the Thing itſelf.—Let *Faith* be as neceſſary, and as meritorious as he pleaſes; but it can neither be neceſſary, nor meritorious to take up our *Faith* without *Reason* or continue in it without *Enquiry*. *Faith* is therefore neceſſary, becauſe it is reaſonable; but 'tis neceſſary only to thoſe who have Time and Ability to underſtand the Reaſons of it.

^c See p. 13, 14.

^d P. 16.

Our Author has taught us to say that ^e *God will never expect more of us, than he enables us to perform; that a sincere Desire to know and do his Will, must supply till his good Time the Deficiency of the actual Knowledge.*

Well, ^f But is not *Faith* necessary to purify and stamp a Value upon the Fruits of common Morality? Do not our Articles and Scriptures declare that, ^g *without this previous Acquisition and devout temper, the best of Lives is no Circumstance to recommend or qualify us, for any Regard from the Throne of Grace?* — Here then at last, I suppose, lies the Sting of the Objection — The Scriptures and our Articles teach us, that an actual Faith is absolutely necessary to Salvation; if therefore this Faith is to be founded on Reason, this must take up *some Time*; and the honest Enquirer, if he should die *in the Interim*, before he is fully satisfied of the Truth of his Religion, is unavoidably damn'd. Let his Conclusions therefore be never so extravagant, we Christians of the Church of *England* are bound to admit them, or own that our Faith is irrational. — But let us first hear what our Articles and Scriptures say — ^h *Works done before the Grace of Christ* (says our thirteenth Article) *are not pleasant to God, forasmuch as they spring not of Faith in Jesus Christ, neither do they make Men meet to receive Grace* — yea — we doubt

^e Page 93, 94. ^f P. 16. ^g P. 15. ^h Artic. xiii.

not but they have the Nature of Sin. — But the Compilers of our Articles design'd this should be understood of the Works of the Heathen; they never dreamt of this Supposition our Author here makes of a *doubting Disciple*. He is suppos'd to be a baptiz'd Christian; and to have received *the Grace of Christ*, and therefore our Author has wisely put — ⁱ *good Works done before Faith*, instead of *Works done before the Grace of Christ*. — The whole Intention indeed of this Article seems to have been to deny all Kind of *Merit*. The *Romanists* held that Christians might by their *good Works merit eternal Life*; they attributed also some Kind of *Merit* to *the good Works* of Heathens, and imagin'd they might give them a Claim and Right to *God's Grace*; but our Church will not allow their Works to be in any Degree *meritorious*. Their best Works were imperfect, and were so far from *meriting* Acceptance or making them worthy and ^k *meet to receive Grace*, (as the *Romanists* express'd it) that taken strictly and in themselves, they were attended with Sin. But what then? If the Heathen were all *vile and wretched Sinners*, if their very best Works were not free from Sin, do we therefore exclude them from all hopes of Mercy? Had they *no room to hope for Acceptance*, because they could plead no *Merit*, nor Title to it?

ⁱ P. 15. ^k Neque *Gratiam* de congruo merentur.

Much less can we suppose they were to be punished for want of that Faith they could not have.

But our Author has farther Proof against us from Scripture. His *singular* Talent in interpreting Scripture, will appear more fully hereafter ; in the mean Time we present the Reader with this small Specimen of his Skill and Fidelity. — ¹ Even his most virtuous Actions (says he, speaking of his *doubting Disciple*) are *highly criminal and displeasing to God, as long as he continues in such a Disposition of Mind.* ^m *For whatsoever is not of Faith, is Sin,* — Why truly here is the Word *Faith*, and the Word *Sin* — and that is all. Did this Writer ever read the whole Verse he has taken his Quotation from ; or could he read it and not see, that *Faith* there means quite another Thing than what he is talking of? — *He that doubteth is damn'd if he eat, because he eateth not of Faith ; for whatsoever is not of Faith, is Sin.* — Is it not plain at first Sight that by *Faith* is here meant, not the Belief of the Gospel, but a Persuasion of the Lawfulness of any Action we allow ourselves in? A worthy Consequence then this! — It is a *Sin* to eat Flesh without being *fully persuaded of the Lawfulness of it*: Therefore whoever enquires into the Truth of his Religion is, during the Enquiry, in a

¹ Page 16.

^m Rom. xiv. 13.

State of Damnation, and whatever he does *is a Sin.*

The next Quotation is full as extraordinary. — ⁿ *He that cometh to God must believe that he is.* — No ordinary Genius, I think, could have extracted any Thing from hence to our Author's Purpose. His Comment is indeed curious — *must believe that he is, — that is, that he has graciously reveal'd his holy Will to Mankind.* — Here is at one Stroke natural and reveal'd Religion confounded; the Belief of a God, and the Belief of a Revelation. But at last this Text is brought home to our Purpose — *and must act only in consequence of such Persuasion.* — Admirable reasoning again — *He that cometh to God must believe the Gospel, and act accordingly:* (though the Apostle in this Place says not a Word about it, but be it so :) Therefore he must take up this Belief without any Reason, and continue in it without any Examination. I cannot help observing, that ^o *curious Disquisitions on the Being and Attributes of God* lie under the same Censure with our Author, as *an Enquiry into the Truth and Authentickness of Revelation.* Natural Religion, it should seem, is, in his Opinion, no more *founded on Argument* than *Christianity* is.

But there follows a third Quotation, no way inferior to the two former. ^p *We must not lift up our Hands to Heaven with doubting:*

ⁿ Page 16. Heb. xi. 6. ^o P. 16. ^p 1 Tim. ii. 8.

Therefore we must be provided of our Creed before we are warranted to pray so much as for Faith itself. — But why must this *Doubting* spoken of by the Apostle, be suppos'd to be about the Truth of our Religion; one would rather think it should signify *doubting* of the Success of our Prayers. But what if after all there is nothing of *doubting* in the Original, what becomes then of our Author's *doubty* Argument? The Word in the Original is *διαλογισμῶς*, which never, as I know of, is us'd to signify *doubting*. It often signifies *disputing*; and we know that *Disputing* and *Wrath* too often go together: But what Connection there is between *Wrath* and *Doubting* is not easy to comprehend.

Our Author's next Argument, is, ' that few Men are qualified for Reasoning at all; ' and the Evidence of Religion is a very critical Point to pronounce upon. — This he seems to lay no small Stress upon; he prosecutes it here at large, and resumes it again several Times in the Compass of this small Treatise. But here again we must complain, that this (as indeed almost all his other Arguments) concludes more strongly against natural Religion, than it does against reveal'd. ' Do the Generality of Apprehensions really extend not beyond a simple Proposition? and are there few Men, who understand the least of In-

† Page 17.

‡ P. 18.

§ P. 17.

duction or Inference? Such Men then are incapable of any Religion at all, and are indeed in no better a Condition than the Beasts of the Field. The Proofs of natural Religion are, I humbly apprehend, attended with as great Difficulties, as those of reveal'd. † *Eternal Relations, moral Differences of Things, and a precise Delineation of the Religion of Nature and its Obligations* here readily occur, as so many indispensable Articles of Enquiry. The Writings of Cudworth, Clarke, and Wollaston, are equally necessary to support Natural Religion, as *the Tryal of the Witnesses, and the Analogy of Reason and Revelation* are to confirm the Truth of the Gospel; and *the Demonstration of the Being of a God à Priori* full as necessary to be consider'd and understood by all Men, as the *Computation of Daniel's Weeks*.

Will this Gentlemen then say, that none but Philosophers and Scholars are obliged to believe and worship a God? or that we can have no Evidence of Natural Religion, till we are inspired by an irresistible Light from Heaven? * He has indeed said this, or something very like it; but of this hereafter. I shall at present examine the Argument before us.

He begins with under-rating most extravagantly the Abilities of Mankind. † He

† See p. 42.

* See p. 81.

† P. 17, 18.

tells us, that *few Men* are capable of giving their *Assent*, if there be the least of *Induction* or *Inference* in the Case; that the *generality* of *Apprehensions* extend not beyond a *simple Proposition*; and are thrown out at once at the very *Mention* of introducing a *Medium*; that the *Souls* of the *Multitude* are lodged in their *Hands* for the wisest *Purposes*, but entirely with a *View* to *active Life*, not for the unfruitful *Province* of *Argument* and *Speculation*. — But give me leave, Sir, to exclaim in your own Words: *What an injurious Representation, what an arbitrary Image is this of Mankind?* What could you have said worse of your Dog? Nay, if he is a Dog of Parts, his *Apprehensions* may, for ought I know, extend beyond a *simple Proposition*. It is indeed ridiculous to talk of *Souls* incapable of apprehending the least of *Induction* or *Inference*; you had expressed yourself more consistently, if you had said (what the *Mahometans*, I think, say of *Women*) that the *Multitude* have no *Souls* at all. It is indeed common for *Persons* of superior *Learning* and *Abilities* to take up too contemptible an *Opinion* of the *Vulgar*. But when they come to converse with them, they will meet with many of them, who can reason shrewdly enough; and may perhaps find them too hard for them in an *Argument*. Daily *Experience* shews that *People* in low *Life* can reason very justly on the common *Occurrences* of it. If they never
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heard of a *Medium*, they know what an *Argument* is, and often understand how to manage Affairs, where a good deal of *Induction and Inference* is required. The Publick Wisdom has thought fit to trust both our Properties and Lives to the Verdict of twelve plain Men, who are generally neither Philosophers nor Scholars. The Issues to be tried before such Men, are just of the same Nature with the Evidences of Christianity. — Matters of Fact, Genuineness of Records, Credibility of Testimony; nay, there may sometimes come perhaps Cases of greater Difficulty to be tried before such a Jury, than is the Truth of the Christian Revelation. And yet this Writer shall imagine, that his confident Assertions shall pass current, without the least Proof, against the common Sense and Experience of Mankind.

For what at last is this Point, which our Author would represent as so *disputable*, and *critical to pronounce upon*? The whole may be comprised in three or four plain Questions, which any Man, of common Capacity is, I believe, able to judge of. — Does the Christian Religion contain any thing in it repugnant to the Law of Nature, any thing contrary to plain Reason? The plain Man need not take up much Time in determining on this Point. He need only consult *the Law written in his Heart*, and compare the Doctrines of the Gospel with his own

Notions of Right and Wrong: If he finds no Disagreement between them, he may rest satisfied on this Head. — Are Miracles a clear Evidence of the Finger of God? This, again, the common Sense of Mankind has always agreed in. Artful Men may indeed puzzle the Question; and Objections may be made, which it may require some Skill to give a proper Answer to. But our Author, I hope, will allow, that the Vulgar would never think of questioning such Evidence. Were they once persuaded, that Miracles were really wrought, they would doubtless all, with one Voice, agree in the Consequence, that *a no Man can do these things, except God be with him.* I hope hereafter to shew, that the Argument from Miracles is as just and conclusive, as it is plain and obvious. Again, were these miraculous Facts attested by credible Witnesses? A few Words, I believe, would suffice to recommend the Testimony of twelve good Men and true, to a common Understanding. Lastly, — is this Testimony faithfully conveyed down to us? This, again, cannot be denied, without calling in Question the Truth of all History. This our Author may venture to do; but it would scarce ever enter into the Head of any plain Man. There are many other Arguments for the Truth of Christianity, which may

^a John iii. 2.

be easily made plain to a Person of ordinary Capacity: Such as the Excellency of its Doctrines, the Completion of plain Prophecies, &c. As these kinds of Proofs are, in their own Nature, accommodated to common Capacities; so there are several small Treatises, where these Proofs are set in an easy Light, from whence the common People may receive reasonable Satisfaction of the Truth of their Religion. Such are LESLEY'S *Short Method with the Deists*, the BISHOP OF LONDON'S *Pastoral Letters*, and many others, which our modern *Free-Thinkers* may sneer at, and throw out general Reflections upon them; but they have been too wise to attempt an Answer to them.

If this Account is true, all that our Author has advanced *Page* 18, 19, 20, will appear to be mere Flourish and Harangue. It is built upon two Suppositions: First, that the generality of Mankind are incapable of perceiving the Evidences of Christianity: Next, ^b that *the Command to believe is peremptory and absolute, and no Conditions in the Case, that we shall believe, if we have Time, if we have Abilities, &c.* But as neither of these Assertions are supported by any Proof, so both of them have now been proved to be false.

^c *It is by no Means sufficient* (says our Author) *that your Argument be indeed conclu-*

^b Pag. 23.

^c P. 19.

five of itself, unless you can adapt it effectually to my Understanding too, and make it conclusive to me. — We admit your *Distinction*, Sir; but who are you? I hope you speak not in your own Person: If you really want either Ears to hear, or Sagacity to apprehend, you will not then be accountable for your want of Understanding. But *you*, who can defend Error with so much Skill and Subtlety, seem not to want the *Talents requisite for entering into Demonstration*. But if you misapply those Talents, and wilfully stop your Ears, I am afraid you must be answerable, if *the Voice of the Charmer* does not affect you. But I suppose, Sir, you speak not of yourself, but in the Person of one of the Vulgar, whom you seem to have so contemptible an Opinion of. But were your injurious Representation of them just and true, your Conclusion would by no means follow. Had they no Abilities to judge at all, it would follow, that God did not require them to judge. ^d When therefore you bring in *the Reasoners on the other Side*, as saying — *This is true; and therefore all Men must believe it;* — you misrepresent them, we say no such thing. We say indeed — This is plain to all Men of common Capacities; all such Men with the common Helps, which may easily be had in a Chri-

^d Pag. 20.

stian Country, may judge of the Evidences of Christianity; and therefore all such Men may be presumed and required to understand and believe the Truth of it; but we are, at the same time, willing to make all reasonable Exceptions and Allowances for those, who are incapable of forming a right Judgment about it.

But our Author has employed all his Skill to magnify the Difficulty of the Gospel-Proofs, as well as to under-rate the Abilities of Mankind. — *“The Nature of the Evidences of Religion (says he) in your Rational Way, being founded entirely on the Credit and Authentickness of History, a very critical Point to pronounce upon, it is impossible, without a good natural Turn for Reasoning, and even some very considerable Acquisitions of Learning superadded, to give any rational Decision at all in the Case. —* But what does this Writer mean? Would he assert, that *the Credit of all History* is so difficult to pronounce upon? Can none but Men of Genius and Learning judge of the *Authentickness* of any *History*, though generally received, and questioned by none? The common Sense of Mankind will contradict him, who all receive many *Histories* without any Scruple or Difficulty. What then? Will he place the Gospels of *Matthew, Mark, Luke, and*

John among the dubious or spurious Writings? Will he say, that these are some of the *Histories, whose Credit and Authentickness the Criticks, and Men of Learning, have found it difficult to pronounce upon?* If he can say this, and prove it too, he will say something to his purpose. But those, who will say any thing, have not yet ventured to say this, they have been either too modest, or too wise to maintain so palpable a Falshood. What becomes then of our Argument? Many of the Writers of Antiquities are dubious; it requires great Parts and Learning to judge of their Authority; therefore no plain Man has any Reason to believe the best attested History extant: In the same manner may we say, — Our Senses often deceive us, it requires no small Skill in Philosophy to correct the Judgments of them: Therefore the Ploughman, at his Work, cannot tell when the Sun shines. — Some Roads are very intricate; none but those, who perfectly know the Country, can be sure of finding their Way in them; therefore the Farmer cannot be certain of finding his Way to Market: Fine Consequences these, and yet our Author must allow them, or give up his own. ^f In another Place we are told, that *eternal Relations, moral Differences of things, and a precise Delineation of the Religion of*

^f Pag. 42.

Nature, and its Obligations, are so many indispensable preliminary Articles to be inculcated, as the Foundation of a new and perfective Revelation. We acknowledge that Natural Religion is the Foundation of Revealed; but we do not therefore say, that a Man must know all the *Relations and moral Difference of things*, before he can judge of the Authority of a Revelation. What we say is, that the common Notions of Good and Evil are plain and obvious to Persons of the meanest Capacities. These the Gospel supposes Men possessed of, and to these it appeals. If it is found to contradict any of these, we own this would be a sufficient Reason for rejecting it; nay, we farther say, that if it contradicts any other natural Truth, if it teaches, that a Part is greater than the whole, or that a Body can be in more than one Place at the same Time, or any thing else contrary to any known Truth, this would also be a reasonable Objection against it. But, I hope, it will not from hence be concluded, that a Man must be first Master of all Arts and Sciences, and take in the whole Compass of Truth, before he can judge of the Evidences of the Gospel. It is sufficient, that he find nothing in it repugnant to the common Notions of Right and Wrong, which he himself understands; he need not search after Objections, which might possibly arise from some unknown Truth. In
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the same manner with regard to moral Truths, the plain Man need only consult *the Law written in his Heart*, and compare the Doctrines of the Gospel with his own Notions of good and evil; if he find no Disagreement between them, he may reasonably receive it, though he never read *Cumberland* or *Wollaston*. For Revelation is not founded on, or proved from the Principles of natural Religion, in the same manner as one Branch of Science often is from another; as Trigonometry, or Conic Sections, for Instance, are founded on, and proved from the Elements of *Euclid*. The direct and positive Proof of Revelation must be fetched from other Topicks. Its Agreement with the Religion of Nature is only a necessary Condition, without which it could not be admitted: And to shew this Agreement, is not to prove, but only to remove what would otherwise be an insuperable Objection against it. When we have done this, we are got no farther than this Conclusion, that what is proposed may be a divine Revelation; whether it be or not, must be determined by its own proper Proofs. The Gospel therefore requires no such *precise Delineation of the Religion of Nature*, as necessary to *introduce* it. It supposes Men indeed to be rational Creatures, possessed of the common Notions of good and evil; and these, as I said before, are plain and obvious to the meanest Capacities.

As

As it contradicts none of these, so it brings with it such Proofs as are at the same time strong and clear, and level to the most vulgar Apprehensions. § Its *Evidences* are such as *require* no great *Degree of Capacity to apprehend*, and give them a proper Hold and Influence; such as must draw all Men, who can be drawn *by the Cords of a Man*, by the Power of Reason, and Force of Argument. We want *no Telescopes to discover the Light, which is prepared before the Face of all People*; it is in itself visible to every Man, but those who shut their Eyes against it. The Gospel indeed is so far from requiring a *precise Delineation of the Religion of Nature by way of preliminary*, that it, in great measure, excuses Men from the Necessity of entering into such *critical and abstracted kind of Topicks*, as our Author calls them. The Philosophers had no other Way of convincing Mankind of the Truth of their Doctrines, but by tedious Reasoning, and a long Deduction of Arguments, which the generality of Mankind had neither Time, nor Capacity to go through with. But it is one great Advantage of Revelation, that it cuts such Enquiries short. When we are once assured of the Authority of our Revelation (and herein, as I have shewn, the plain Man may soon receive reasonable Satisfaction) all other things

§ See p. 43.

are settled of Course, and we may learn our whole Duty from hence with much greater Dispatch, Ease, and Certainty, than it was possible to do in the Way of natural Religion.

Our Author resumes the same Topick again: ^h *If a just Apprehension of the Authority and Sense of the Scriptures be necessary for us to attain by Reasoning; so is in the first Place, it must be granted, a good Degree of natural Understanding for the purpose; so is, again, a compleat Skill in Language and Science. —* ⁱ *To state properly its Merits, and clear its Meaning; to settle first the Canon, and then the Contents, is plainly enough a Task, that no less Qualifications can at all admit our Undertaking. If a Bible be therefore once necessary for this strict and solemn Perusal, 'tis easy to see, that so are other convenient Means of Information in great abundance, to give it both Light and Sanction; that so is Prideaux's Connexion, for Instance, amongst a thousand other Volumes, to illustrate and support it. And after all he is, it seems, very short and reasonable in the Computation of his Demands. —* Now all this fine Reasoning is built upon this notable Maxim, that no Man can have any reasonable Assurance of the plainest Truth, without knowing every thing that may be said

^h Pag. 62.

ⁱ P. 63.

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about it; without being perfect Master of every Argument, which may be brought *to illustrate and support it*; and of every Difficulty, which may any way relate to it. Let us then make an Experiment of this kind of reasoning in some other Cases. ^k *The Existence of a God is*, as our Author tells us, *the plainest Question in Nature*; and Vanini himself owned, that every Straw was a Proof of it. But can no one have a *just Apprehension* of this great Truth, without understanding all the Controversies, which have been raised about it, or without reading *Derham's Physico-Theology*, and *a thousand other Volumes*, which have been wrote *to illustrate and support it*? Again, an ordinary Degree of Understanding may suffice to perceive, that the same Wisdom and Power, which made the World, must govern it too. But can no one have any Reason to believe a Providence, without being able to account for all the Difficulties of it? Once more, the most illiterate Person on Earth is conscious, that he has a thinking Soul. But can he have no Reason to believe this Truth, till he has read *Locke of Human Understanding*, and fully considered all the Questions, which have been raised about the Origin, Nature, and Operations of the Soul? I might instance farther in a thousand Cases in common Life.

^k Pag. 81.

There is scarce any thing so plain and obvious, but that learned Men have, some way or other, raised Disputes about it: And yet, I hope, there is such a thing as plain Truth, and common Sense. With regard then to the Truth of the Gospel, I hope I have proved, that a Person of common Understanding may have reasonable Assurance of it. But as the Gospel has plain Proof to support it, so is it confirmed by several other Proofs; some of them perhaps disputable, which even those who believe the Gospel, are not agreed about; some of them, though conclusive, yet something abstruse and difficult, such as may require some Skill in Language and Antiquities to set in a proper Light. Thus the Completion of plain Prophecies is a clear and undeniable Proof of the Truth of Christianity, though, at this Distance of Time, it may require no small Skill and Learning to settle the Meaning of others more obscure, to confirm and illustrate the Proof drawn from such, and clear it from all Difficulties and Objections. Such Proofs as these are not *a calculated for the general and ready Use of all those, to whom the Precept of believing is addrest.* They, who have neither Time to consider of them, nor Capacity to judge of them, are not *bound to admit their Force.* But yet notwithstanding, they may be required to believe, because they have other plain

^a See pag. 21.

and sufficient Reasons for their Faith. A Man may have reasonable Assurance of the Truth of the Gospel, without being able to judge of the different ^b *Calculations* of Daniel's *Weeks*; nay, he may from this very Prophecy, without entering into the Disputes of the Learned on this Point, form a very clear Argument in Defence of Christianity. He may argue against the *Jews*, that the Time here fixed for the coming of the *Messiah*, is, according to all possible Calculations, long ago expired; and therefore that the *Messiah* must be already come. Nay, without much reading, he may see farther, that, though it is not easy to fix the precise Beginning and End of these *Weeks*, yet it is pretty certain, that they ended about the Time that *Christ* appeared in the World.

Again, an Argument may be very clear in itself, and yet there may be several things relating to it, which may admit of Dispute: There may be several things incidental to the main purposes of Religion, which the Learned may be usefully employed in. But the Unlearned may believe the Truth of the Gospel, on clear and full Proof, without concerning themselves with such Questions as these.

Farther, though the Evidences of Christianity are obvious to every Man of common Understanding, yet artful Men may start

^b See p. 20.

Difficulties, and raise Objections such as may exercise and try the Abilities of the Learned. This makes it necessary to employ no small Skill and Learning, in Defence of a Cause, which otherwise, perhaps, would need none.

^a The ingenious Author of the *Analogy of Reason and Revelation*, had not perhaps thought it necessary to reconcile them, if others had not taken no small Pains to set them at variance. His excellent Performance will, I doubt not, be always in Esteem with the learned World, though every Mechanick be not able to apprehend the Justness and Fineness of his Reasonings. The Providence of God is a Truth, which a small Share of Reason and Observation may serve to discover; but yet there are Difficulties attending it, which might require the masterly Pen of a *Sherlock*. Why then might not the Worthy Author of *the Tyrant of the Witnesses*, be as usefully employ'd in confirming and vindicating the Truth of our Saviour's Resurrection. They have indeed both executed their Design with the same Success; both inimitable, both unanswerable. ^b Our Author methinks should have avoided putting us in mind of a Book, which bears full Evidence against him. He owns it to be *a noble and convincing Demonstration*. A fair Confession (one would think) that *Christianity is*

^a See p. 20. ^b P. 62.

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founded on Argument. But, it seems, *all those, whom that Lesson may concern, are not able to extract and range the Proofs of it thus advantageously.* — And what would he infer from hence? The Evidence may be plain and convincing to every Man of common Sense, though scarce any other Hand could sum it up with such Force and Clearness. I would willingly trust this very *Tryal* to the Determination of any Jury of plain honest Men, though the ingenious Author did not design his Treatise so much for the Satisfaction of the Vulgar, as for an Answer to such Objections, as no common Person would ever have thought of. But it seems these *noble and convincing Demonstrations*^c have just the *contrary Effect* upon our Author from what they have upon every Body else: Instead of *convincing his Reason of the Truth* of the Thing demonstrated, *they strongly suggest to him that such a Position can never be that necessary Truth, which stands in Need of any such farfetch'd Apologies, and labour'd Accounts to reconcile and explain it.* But why? *Because the whole Force of the Gospel Evidence, must have been co-temporary with the original Institution itself:*^d Otherwise the People would have been but very ill provided with a proper Representation of these Matters, before these Voluntary Apostles were

^c Page 21. ^d P. 62.

pleased to engage in their Assistance. — What shall one say to a Person of this perverse Turn of Mind? He must surely be of a very *particular Infidel-make and Antichristian Complexion*, that can thus turn the very best Remedies into Poison. But pray, will he himself admit of this Kind of Reasoning in any other Case? Let us again desire him to try his Argument on the great Truths of the Being and Providence of God. ^e Were People destitute of any reasonable Satisfaction in these *important Points*, before *Dr. Clarke* engag'd in their Assistance, or *Dr. Sherlock* arose a Master in Israel? Let him go to some Counsel learned in the Law, and ask him whether the most full and compleat Evidence may not receive some additional Light and Strength in the Hands of a *M——y*, or *F——k——y*? Let him ask again, whether the plainest Cause may not be puzzled and perplexed by an artful Adversary? and whether it may not often require great Skill and Pains to unravel all the cunning Sophisms of a subtle Objector, and set the plain Truth in a clear Light? ^g *The Evidences* of Religion then were *co-temporary with the Original Institution itself*: Nor would her Cause need any Advocate, were not her Enemies daily labouring with an unaccountable Zeal and Industry to puzzle and misrepresent it. *The*

^e See p. 45. ^f See p. 62. ^g See p. 21.

Witnesses of our Lord's Resurrection had been long ago heard, and after a fair *Trial*, carried their Cause: If again, on a Second *Trial* their Cause receives fresh Light and Strength, we must thank our Adversaries, whose Objections alone were the Occasion that a Re-hearing was thought necessary. But these Gentlemen are continually attacking Religion with *labour'd* Sophistry, and *far-fetch'd* Objections; and then if we endeavour to guard against their Mis-representations, our *Apologies* come too *late*. We should have defended ourselves, before we were attack'd; and detected their false Reasoning before ever they publish'd ^s it.

But there is one Part of the Objection remains still unspoken to. ^h Our Author represents it as difficult *to attain a just Apprehension of the Sense* as well as of the *Authority, of Scripture*. — I might indeed dismiss this Point as Foreign to our present Purpose: I shall however bestow a Word or two upon it. Our Divines in their Writings against the Church of *Rome*, have fully shewn that all Things necessary to be known are clearly and plainly reveal'd in Scripture. Other Things there

^s Since I wrote this, I have met with a Pamphlet entitl'd, *An Answer to the Trial of the Witnesses*: But, on the Perusal of it, I find no Reason to retract any Thing I have here said. This Author's Objections will be consider'd hereafter in my Fifth Chapter, if I am not in the mean Time prevented by some abler Hand.

^h Page 62.

are

are less necessary ; and these are sometimes difficult and obscure: The Sense of some particular Passages may be doubtful, and yet the Truth suppos'd to be contain'd in them deliver'd clearly elsewhere ; many Prophecies may be obscure ; Points of History and Chronology may be difficult to settle and adjust ; several Things incidental and circumstantial, with regard to the main Purport of Scripture, may employ and exercise the Skill of the Learned. In these and such like Points, *Prideaux*, and other learned Authors may be usefully consulted by those who have Leisure, and Capacity to enter into such Disquisitions. But they are by no Means necessary to be read and understood by every unlearned Christian, any more than the ingenious Dr. *Hales's* Vegetable Staticks is for an ordinary Gardiner, or the curious Observations of the *French Astronomers in Lap-Land* for every common Sailor. ⁱ As to the *Canon of Scripture*, the unlearned Christian may rest satisfied that 'tis already *settled* to his Hands ; very few of those Books we receive were ever doubted of ; all of them have been long ago receiv'd universally ; even the Enemies of Christianity do not, nor cannot, deny those Books to be wrote by the Authors whose Names they bear : So that a common Christian seems to have very little Occasion to

enter into a critical Enquiry on this Head.

After all, should we be so complaisant as to grant our Author the whole of this Objection, should we allow that the Evidences of Christianity are above the Comprehension of the Vulgar, yet this would by no Means come up to his Point, we might still contend that *Christianity is founded on Argument*, though we should own that the Arguments which support it are not adapted to every Understanding: Nay, our Author himself has kindly furnish'd us with this Distinction.^k He has own'd that the Proofs of the Gospel are demonstrative, though he, it seems, has not the Talents requisite for entering into Demonstrations: ^l He has confess'd that *the Tryal of the Witnesses is a noble and convincing Demonstration*; ^m and that *Mr. Addison has certainly evinc'd beyond all Contradiction, the Veracity of the sacred Writings and Mission*. These are all so many plain Contradictions to the very Title of his Book; but perhaps he only means to play the Droll: However we shall soon find him making full amends for these ample Concessions, and contradicting himself again. He will tell us presently: ⁿ That the Evidence of these Facts so *convincingly demonstrated, is no more than uncertain Hear-say*, ^o *no Demonstration to any that were not actually and personally present,*

^k Page 19. ^l P. 62. ^m P. 18. ⁿ P. 53. ^o P. 51.

when

when they were done, ^p that these *sacred Writings* whose *Veracity* is so certainly evinc'd beyond all *Contradiction*, are no better than *suspicious Repositories* of human *Testimony*, that cannot deserve our least *Notice*, or be thought of *Consequence* to engage a *Moment's Attention*.

But our Author, I suppose, will tell us ^q that the *Terms of Salvation* are calculated for the *Benefit* of those who cannot read; that the *Precept of believing* is, according to our Principles, *addrest* to the unlearned, as well as the Learned; if therefore they cannot understand the Arguments by which the Truth of Christianity is supported, they must have some other Foundation for their Faith. — Be it so, but why must this be immediate Inspiration? Will not Authority suffice? But this perhaps will *alarm* our Author's *Philosophical Zeal*. ^r He has, it seems, the *justest Contempt* for the Notion of *Mens thinking by Deputy* the best they can, when they are not qualified to think for themselves. — Has he so? He must then have a *Contempt* for every benighted and wandering Traveller, who is glad of a Guide; a *Contempt* for every Ship that comes into the River, for they all take in a Pilot; a *Contempt* for every one, who is wise enough to take Advice. His *Contempt* surely had been *juster*, had it been bestowed on those, who, though *not qualified to think*

for themselves, will yet neither be advised, nor directed, but are *wiser in their own Conceits than seven Men that can render a Reason*. We desire then all Men, who can think, to think for themselves; we desire all to judge, as far as they are capable of judging: We offer the Grounds and Reasons of our Religion to a fair Trial, and not only permit, but require all Men to examine it, who have Opportunity and Abilities to enter upon the Enquiry. But if there are any not *qualified for Reasoning at all*, let them follow the Guidance of those who are *qualified*; this is the wisest and most reasonable Course they can take; such Men must, and do act upon Authority in almost every other Affair of Life. Should they then take their Religion upon Trust, and believe in *Christ* for no other Reason, but because they have been so taught, yet, if this Faith is fruitful of good Works, I can see no Reason why it may not be accepted and rewarded. God does not indeed expect Men to judge who are not qualified to judge; he does not require a *Rational Faith* of those who are incapable of understanding the Reasons of it. But yet he may expect and require them to believe what they have been taught, if they have no Reasons for doubting of it. If Men in these Circumstances *unqualified for reasoning at all*, throw off the Religion they were educated in, it is plain that not Reason, but some unreasonable and
vicious

vicious Affections must be the Motive, and such a Conduct must doubtless, be displeasing and offensive to God.

But not only the Vulgar (it seems) but (what is still more surprizing) *the ablest and best of Men* are said to be *disqualified for fair Reasoning by their natural Prejudices*. — But what are these *natural Prejudices*? We live in a Christian Country; and our *natural Prejudices* generally lie on the Side of Christianity. In other Ages and Countries, Men might be by their Education prejudiced against the Gospel. They might have contracted *an innocent Partiality* for the Religion they were educated in; *an honest and natural Fondness for their old Friends*; and I doubt not but that the good God would make all reasonable Allowances for such *Prejudices* as these. But this is not the Case with us; *the Cause of Christ* is not here *the Cause of the Stranger*: We were most of us educated in the Principles of the Christian Religion. What *Prejudices* then can our Modern *Philosophers* have imbib'd against it, unless Vanity, Fondness of Novelty, and an Affectation of superior Sense and Learning have taken Possession of their Hearts? or unless the Vices so severely condemned and threatned in the Gospel, may be suppos'd to be the *Favourites in whose interest they are concern'd*? But those

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who lie under such *Prejudices*, are not *the ablest and best of Men*, nor will this be allow'd of, as a Plea in the great Day of Examination.

Again, let me ask our Author, how the *Prejudices* of such Men can affect the Reasonableness of Christianity. Our Faith may be *founded on Argument*, though such as are *disqualified for fair Reasoning* may not be in a Condition to receive it. Besides how are such Persons like to be better provided for on his Scheme, than on ours? † His Method of *Conviction* as well as ours requires a *proper Disposition of Mind to give it Reception for it's Efficacy*; but those who will not hearken to *fair Reasoning*, will probably be dispos'd ‡ to rebel against all the gracious Instances of the Divine Spirit to enlighten their Hearts. Reason will convince all reasonable Men; but there is no Remedy for *Obstinacy, Impiety, and Perverseness*.

Our Author proceeds next to paint the Insufficiency of Reason and the Defects of a *Rational Faith*, in the strongest Colours. * He tells us that a Rational Faith *will not produce that lively and active Spirit of Zeal, which becomes the Professors of the Gospel*; † that it is *precarious and changeable with every wind of Doctrine*; ‡ that it would *minister little Comfort and Satisfaction of*

† Pag. 63. † Sec p. 64. * P. 24. † P. 26. ‡ P. 29.

Mind;

Mind; ^a and is not of Force sufficient to command our Passions and make us virtuous against our Inclinations; ^b much less to make us suffer Martyrdom. — But I must once more put this Gentleman in Mind, that every Thing he here advances holds most strongly against Natural Religion. If the Determinations of Reason are so precarious, no Man can have any settled Principles whatsoever, if Reason is so weak and insufficient; those who had no other Guide but Reason, could have no Religion at all. If there is no Complacency and Satisfaction of Mind resulting from the Dictates of Reason; if no Conviction drawn from Reasoning can have Force enough to make us virtuous against our Inclinations, nor the highest Degree of moral Assurance be a sufficient Balance for present Temptations, then farewell Virtue, farewell Honour, farewell whatsoever Things are lovely, and of good Report. Our Author methinks should have reflected a little on the Tendency of his Arguments before he published them; and not shot his Bolt at Revelation, without considering first, where it would fall, and what it might strike. I shall enter therefore into a particular Examination of his Reasonings on this Head, in order to vindicate the Cause of Natural Religion as well as Reveal'd.

^a Page 30.

^b P. 32.

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^a And, first, we are told, *that a rational Faith is not sufficient to remove Mountains, and make Men walk upon the Water.* I know of no Occasion we have to do either. The Objections of our modern Unbelievers are all that our *Faith* has to *remove*; and these can never be called *Mountains*, unless this ingenious Gentleman *can make a Mountain of a Mole-hill.* But let him look again into his Bible, and he will find, that *Faith*,^b in the Places he alludes to, does not, nor cannot signify the Belief of the Gospel. *Christ* had promised to enable his Apostles to work Miracles; and by *Faith* he here means a Trust and Confidence in his Assistance, a firm Belief of the Truth of that particular Promise, not of the Truth of the Gospel in general.

Our Author proceeds to teach us, that a *rational Faith* would prove too cold, and would never produce that lively and active Spirit of Zeal, which is every where so strongly recommended to all Professors of the Gospel. — It may be true indeed, that Enthusiasts and Bigots are often more zealous than the rational Christian. But such a Zeal as this is neither *recommended*, nor even allowed by *the Gospel*. The true Christian Zeal is (as our Author himself observes)^c *a Zeal according to Knowledge*; and it bears a

^a Pag. 24.

^b Matth. xvii. 20. xiv. 31.

^c Pag. 29. Rom. x. 2.

Resemblance to that *Knowledge* from whence it springs. ^d It is *first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of Mercy and good Fruits, without Partiality, and without Hypocrisy.* — But a *Zeal* according to *Knowledge* (we are told^e) *will scarce ever deserve the Name.* — No, Sir, what think you of *Zeal* for one's Country? *Zeal* in Defence of our happy Constitution? *Zeal* for the Principles of Virtue and Honour? May we not *express a sanguine Concern* for these great important Points? May we not behave with a *laudable Warmth* in such a Cause; and yet our *Zeal* be guided by Reason, and tempered by Charity? The Man, who thoroughly understands these things, surely may, and will *contend earnestly* for them, without supposing himself infallible.

But it should seem, according to our Author, we are to have no Principles at all; and then (it must be owned) our *Zeal* will be very unnecessary. These are his very Words: *What Reason first established, it is evident the same Reason must ever have the Power to repeal. Hence a rational Faith will ever be subject to change, and the most fixed Resolves and mature Determinations that Reason can make, must be always ready to be turned about with every Wind of Do-*

^d Jam. iii. 17.

^e Pag. 25.

^f P. 26.

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ctrine, as the Evidence shall shift to another Point. — What does he mean? That what is true To-day may become false To-morrow? Or is our Reason so very weak and precarious, that we can come to no fixed Resolves, no Determinations, but what are changeable with every Wind? Take it which Way you will, it is down-right Scepticism. If Reason is so subject to Change, and Evidence apt to shift about to every Point of the Compass, we can have no Certainty, no settled Principles whatsoever. If our Author will seriously avow this, I must have done with him. It is to no purpose to reason with a Man, who has no Principles; nor do I desire to drive an Adversary to a greater Absurdity than Scepticism is.

But perhaps what follows may explain his Meaning. *Reason (he says) can never be so absurdly partial and tenacious as, for the sake of any Conclusions already made, to turn a deaf Ear to all future Suggestions: — Whereas it is the religious Man's Interest, as it is his Duty, to persist in the Faith he has once espoused, to his Life's End. — This Gentleman then, it seems, is resolved to turn Sceptick, because he can see no Medium between Scepticism and Bigotry. We must, according to him, be either changeable like a Weather-cock, or fixed like a Mountain;*

either *ready to turn about with every Wind of Doctrine, or else so absurdly tenacious, as to turn a deaf Ear to all future Suggestions.* Whereas, in Truth, the right Way lies between these two Extremes. In Religion, as well as in Philosophy, we are allowed and required to make our Enquiries with Freedom; but in neither of them can it be reasonable to keep the Enquiry always on Foot. In many Cases we may, in Cases where Practice is depending we must, come to some settled Determination. And surely where the Evidence is full and clear, we may rest satisfied in it, and shut up our Enquiry. We may be reasonably assured, that the *mature Determinations of Reason* made, after a fair Examination, and on full Proof, are *irreversible*, and not *subject to Change*. A Man thus satisfied, will not be *ready to be turned about with every Wind of Doctrine*: He will not admit of every trifling Objection, every little Difficulty against plain Proof. No (says our Author) ^f *the Philosopher, after his strongest Conclusions, speaks, however, very diffidently of their Continuance, and is unavoidably liable to Recantation every Moment of his Life without Remedy.* — Sir Isaac Newton, I suppose, did not know whether what he had demonstrated To-day, he should not be obliged to *recant* To-morrow; and

^f Pag. 26.

Euclid and *Archimedes*, after their clearest Demonstrations, spoke very *diffidently* of their *Conclusions*. And yet we find the one has subjoined *Q. E. D.* to his Demonstrations, and the other never, all his Life-time, found Reason to *recant* his *Εὐρηκα*, nor has he, nor any of his Followers to this Day, found Room for *second Thoughts*. Well, but are we then *to turn a deaf Ear to all future Suggestions*? No: A Man may be certain, and yet not think himself infallible; he may be firmly persuaded of the Truth of his Principles, and act on such a Persuasion with full Satisfaction of Mind; and yet, if Objections offer, he may be ready to give them a fair Hearing. * But *the religious Man* (we are told) is in Duty bound to *disclaim all further Trial*: No such thing. Religion requires no more of us, than what Prudence dictates in every Affair of Life. A good Judge will give both Sides a fair hearing, and will determine according to the Evidence; and, no doubt, he is often fully satisfied in the Judgment he has given. But yet, however fully satisfied, if there shall afterwards appear good Reason to suspect an Error, he may give the Cause a Re-hearing. In Points of Philosophy, in the common Affairs of Life, I may receive reasonable Satisfaction, and acquiesce in what I have discovered without further

Enquiry. ^h Though my *Judgment* may continue, for some time, to *vibrate* in Uncertainty; yet its *Vibrations* will at length be over, unless it moves *in vacuo*: And, when once it is well fixed, I need not set it in Motion again, merely to try Experiments. But yet afterwards, if weighty Reasons offer, I may give, what I before thought myself certain of, a new Examination. The very same, and no more, does Religion require of us. We are to enquire into the Truth of our Profession as far as our Abilities and Circumstances will permit. It is supposed, that such an Enquirer may receive reasonable Satisfaction. When we are arrived to this, we may safely acquiesce in it, and need not pursue our Enquiry any farther. To be *ever learning, and never able to come at the Knowledge of Truth*, is a Procedure as unworthy of a rational Being, as to be unalterably attached to our Opinions, and *turn a deaf Ear to all future Suggestions*. But, though our Enquiry is at an End, yet, if there afterwards appears good Ground to suspect our former Opinions, we may then resume it again, and, if we see Reason, determine the other Way. But if we have no reasonable Doubt of our present Persuasion, we are not bound to raise any, but may honestly and safely sit down, and rest in our present Con-

viction. ¹ What our Author adds of *the Case of a Convert*, shews the Fruitfulness of his Imagination; but wants Fact, I am afraid, to support it. It has, on the contrary, been generally observed, that *Renegadoes* are more zealously attached to the Cause they go over to, than its original Votaries. But what if some Converts (as there want not Instances of this kind) finding themselves mistaken in what they once thought themselves very certain of, afterwards become too suspicious and diffident of themselves; is there no such thing therefore as Certainty? Or must we therefore be either blindly attached to our present Persuasion, or continue for ever in a State of Wavering and Uncertainty? No, let us examine into the Evidences of our Religion, and be able to give *a Reason of the Hope that is in us*; and that will be our best Security against Doubtfulness or Apostasy. On the contrary, a Man, who has taken up his Faith without Reason, is too often apt to run from one Extreme to another. He discovers perhaps some Mistakes in the Principles of his Education; this makes him doubt of every thing. Having no Foundation in himself, the least Motion sets him *adrift*; he continues fluctuating from one thing to another, and, at last, for want of better Hold, *anchors* in the sandy Bottom of Scepticism or Infidelity.

¹ Pag. 27.

^m Our Author has advanced another Fact of the same kind with equal Confidence, but less Appearance of Truth. He appeals to the *Annals of our own Country*, to prove that there never has been seen less of Zeal and Steadiness in the Cause of Religion, than at those particular Junctures, when the Circumstances of the Times necessarily led Men to the closest Enquiry into its Merits. — Pray, Sir, what Times and what Annals do you refer to? All the *Annals* I have met with, all the *Times* I ever heard of, declare just the contrary. But I will not send you to any *Annals*. I will only put you in mind of what passed in the Memory of Man. You yourself may possibly remember, your Father at least must have told you, that there were, within these threescore Years, Times of Difficulty, when our Clergy shewed a remarkable Zeal and Steadiness in the Cause of Religion, and very inconsiderable was the Number of those, who made it their Principle to vary every Day with the Establishment.

ⁿ But our Author proceeds to tell us, that the rational Believer cannot promise himself that Complacency and Satisfaction of Mind, which is the blessed Fruit of that true and genuine Faith he contends for. — Why not? Because he cannot pronounce himself inviolably secure in his Adherence to the Cause he

has espoused. — But his Premises have been already considered, and confuted; and therefore we may dismiss the Conclusion together with them.

° But the ignorant and bigotted, it seems, enjoy their *Belief with much greater Tranquillity and Confidence of Spirit.* — A shrewd Argument! The Fool is usually more confident than the wise Man; therefore the wise Man can never have any Reason to be confident of any thing. He must distrust the plainest Conclusions of Reason; the most precious Promises can give him no Comfort or Satisfaction, nor the most certain Hopes of Immortality support him in his gloomy Hours. One would rather think, that a rational Faith should be less *liable to Misgivings and Distrusts*, than one taken up without Reason, and built upon Fancy and Enthusiasm. The warmest Imagination will sometimes grow cool, and the most confident Enthusiast will have his gloomy Intervals, his Seasons of Dereliction. What then shall support him in this hopeless Condition? *Reasons* he has none to *recollect*; *the Basis of his Hopes* was founded on the Sand, and must sink, when that gives way. But Reason generally burns with a more constant and equal Flame. The Hope which is built upon Reason, *is founded on a Rock*, and though

the Rains descend, the Floods come, and the Winds blow, it shall stand unshaken and immoveable.

In the following Pages our Author talks so very loosely, that I cannot easily fix his Meaning: ^p He tells us, that no *Conviction*, drawn from Reasoning, can ever have Force enough to make us virtuous against our Inclinations; that the highest Degree of moral Assurance will never be a sufficient Balance for present Temptations. — ^q And, again, that the strongest moral Assurance is not that cordial Reflection and Dependance, that can inspire all the amazing Constancy and Resolution into Men, expiring under the last Extremity of Torture. — And he goes on to set forth how natural it is for Men, in such Circumstances, ^r to distrust rational Conviction, and to prefer the great Duty of Self-preservation to the most plausible Hypothesis. — What does he mean by all this? Would he say, that it is impossible, by the united Force of Reason and Religion, to command our Passions, and restrain the Propensities of our Nature? To condemn the Terrors of Death, and sacrifice our Lives in Defence of the Truth? Or is none but the Enthusiast capable of doing this? This is directly subversive of all Virtue; but (Thanks be to God) we can produce a Cloud of Witnesses to testify the

^p Pag. 30.

^q P. 33.

^r P. 34.

contrary.

contrary. Every wise and good Man, either Christian or Heathen, who hath lived a virtuous Life, bears full Testimony against him. Every Man, who hath died in the Cause, of his Country, for the sake of Honour. Virtue, or Religion, is a Demonstration to the contrary. Many have resisted the strongest Temptations, and encountered Death itself in all its Terrors; and professed to do so upon rational Principles.

Does our Author then mean, that Persons who have thus sacrificed their Ease or their Lives for the Sake of Virtue or Religion, have acted foolishly? for this also many of his Expressions plainly import. ^a *The most valuable Reversions, he tells us, are but of small Regard in Competition with what is before us? Nor can we be justly blam'd for this Conduct.* ^b And again he says, that the Martyrs, if they did not proceed upon a much higher and surer Principle than the strongest Operations of Reason, died as a Fool dieth.

What shall I say to a Man who talks at this Rate? Are *present* Enjoyments then justly preferable to *the most valuable Reversions*, and that Reason bids us not trust too far to Futurity. Is not then the Glutton and the Drunkard, the Whore-monger and Adulter, the Traytor and the Coward justly to be

^a Page 32.^b P. 33.

blam'd? Are the *Sollicitations of Sense, the Propensities of deprav'd Nature* sufficient to weigh down the *Balance* against the Pleasures of Virtue, the Testimony of our Conscience, and the Hopes of Immortality? Is it no better than ^c a *specious Conjecture*, a ^d *flattering Likelihood*, a ^e *plausible Hypothesis*, that Virtue and Happiness are inseparable, or that ^f *God is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek him!* In vain then have the Philosophers writ of the Sufficiency of Virtue, the Government of the Passions, and the Contempt of Death. The wisest and best of Men have been most wretchedly mistaken, who have willingly parted with *present Enjoyments*, and chearfully renounced *all their Hopes and Interests in this World*, with much less Assurance than the Christian Martyrs had, of being happy for ever in the next. Did Socrates die as a Fool dieth? must Leonidas, Epaminondas, Codrus, the Decii, and all the Heroes of Antiquity, who have sacrificed their Lives in the Defence of their Country in the Cause of Honour and Virtue, stand condemn'd of Folly? or must we return the Charge upon our Author? The Cause of Virtue, Sir, does not depend on ^g *venerable Tradition and historical Records*: I will not send you to your Bible to be better instructed: Go, you may learn bet-

^c Page 31.

^d P. 33.

^e P. 34.

^f Heb. xi. 6.

^g See p. 31.

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ter Morals of the Heathen Poet; he will tell you,

*Phalaris licet imperet, ut sis
Falsus, & admoto dictet perjuriam tauro,
Summum crede nefas animam præferre Pudori,
Et propter Vitam vivendi perdere causas.*

But perhaps it may weigh more with our Author, if we turn the Argument another Way. Let me then beg him to consider that he not only contradicts the Rules of Religion, the Dictates of Philosophy, and the common Voice of Mankind, but even the establish'd Rules of Calculation too. Let me ask him whether he would not part with a *present* Sum for a valuable *Reversion*. Nay, do not Men often lay down ready Money for a contingent *Reversion*? and do not the known Laws of Chance justify their Prudence? — A pretty Proposition this! ^b *The most valuable Reversions are but of small Regard in Competition with what is before us: Farewell then not only Religion and Virtue, but even Commerce too. — You must not lay out your Money in Trade; for this is parting with the Good we have, and trusting to Futurity for amends; and Reason forbids this, if there be the least Possibility of our being disappointed in our Security. You must not sow; for this is putting yourself to present Expence and*

Trouble ; and perhaps at last you may be disappointed of your Crop. You must deny yourself no Pleasure, submit to no Hardship, and put yourself to no Trouble, not so much as take Physick ; for this is parting with the Good we have, and *depending confidently on distant Expectations and Promises for our Compensation.*

ⁱ Our Author would, as far as I can find, in Times of Persecution be for *making the strictest prudential Estimate upon the Matter ; and computing with the most impartial Exactness the Advantage and Loss attending each important Alternative.* Let us take the Thing in his own Light, and examine whether in this View the *Martyrs* were such *Fools* as he seems to imagine them. To proceed then regularly in our Calculation, we ought to consider what they parted with, what they expected in Reversion, and what Reason they had to expect it. They parted with the Pleasures and Interests of this World ; and what Value, pray, will our Author put upon these ? If they were weigh'd in the Balance, I will not say *of the Sanctuary* but) of sound Reason, they will be found *deceitful upon the Weights, and altogether lighter than Vanity itself.* Every wise Man knows that true Happiness consists in the Practice of Virtue, that the Pleasures of Sense afford no true Satisf-

faction; that ^k this *delicious Apple* palls upon the Taste, and is *bitter in the Belly*: That our *darling Passions* will ruin the Man who indulges them; and the *Appetites of our deprav'd Nature*, if gratified, will make us miserable even in this Life. ^l Does Reason then *bid us make sure* of these Enjoyments at any Rate; and is not a reasonable Man *justly to be blam'd for such a Conduct*? Is it not indeed the Privilege of *Reason* to see beyond *what is before us*? to look into *Futurety*, and consider the Consequences of our Actions? He who can or will look no farther than *the Objects* that are *present and familiar to his Desires*, strikes himself out of the list of rational Creatures; he liveth as a Dog liveth, and well would it be for him, if he could die as a Dog dieth.

But however, it may be replied, that *the Martyrs* did not only part with *present Enjoyments*, but they parted with Life itself, and *renounc'd all their Hopes and Interests in this World*. ^m And what is Life? It is even a *Vapour that appeareth for a little Time, and then vanisheth away*. It was what they could not hold long, what they knew not how soon they might, in the Course of Nature, be deprived of: And what are the Enjoyments of this World? uncertain, fleeting, and unsatisfactory, scarce a Balance for the many Evils

^k Page 32.^l See *ibid.*^m Jam. iv. 14.

and Hardships of Life. If we were not born for Immortality, we had been better never born at all; if we had no Expectation of a better Life, this would be scarce worth the preserving. I must own that if I had *no Hope*, and were *without God in the World*, I should willingly subscribe to the Sentence of the ⁿ Poet:

Ἦν ἄρα τοῖνδε δυοῖν ἐνὸς αἵρεσις, ἢ τὸ γενέσθαι
Μηδέποτε, ἢ τὸ θανεῖν αὐτίκα τικτόμενον.

Let us see next what these Martyrs and Confessors expected in Reversion: It was a blessed Immortality, ° *an exceeding and eternal Weight of Glory*. Since then the Prize in View was so valuable, and what they parted with so inconsiderable, the least Chance of obtaining it will justify the Prudence of their Conduct. But our Author himself owns that they had ^p *all the moral Certainty they could desire, the highest Degree of rational Evidence that the Nature of the Subject can possibly admit*. I hope then they must stand fully acquitted from the Charge of Folly. But there is another Circumstance still farther to be consider'd; they had Reason to fear the Punishment of their Apostasy, as well as to hope for the Reward of their Constancy and Fidelity. And here our Author

^p *Posidippus* ap Min. Poet. ° 2 Cor. iv. 17. ^p P. 32.

again will tell us, ¹ that where *there is a Hell on one Side of the Question, it is but natural Prudence to take readily to the safest Side.* It needed therefore no very *exact Computation* to determine what Choice they in Prudence ought to make on this *important Alternative.* It would have been the Height of Folly and Madness, for the Sake of preserving this Life a few Years, to run the Hazard of eternal Damnation. Should they at last find themselves mistaken, should both their Hopes and their Fears prove groundless, their Loss, as we have seen, would be but inconsiderable. The Scorners might make a Jest of their Firmness and Constancy; but their Scoffs could never reach, or affect them: They would soon be in the same Condition themselves; perish for ever, and be no more. But, if there should be really a future State of Happiness, or Misery, who would then appear to be the Fool? ² Then they, who have *made no Account of the Labours* of these faithful Servants of God, *repenting, and groaning for Anguish of Spirit, shall say within themselves, This was he, whom we had sometimes in Derision, and a Proverb of Reproach. We Fools accounted his Life Madness, and his End to be without Honour. How is he number'd among the Children of God, and his Lot is among the Saints?*

¹ Page 88. ² Wisd. v. 14.

But possibly I may be told I mistake my Author's Meaning all this while: He may say, he did not intend to quarrel with *Reason* in general: But only to shew, that the *Reasons*, on which the Christian Faith is founded, are not sufficient to bear the Weight, that is laid on them. If he does say so, his own Words above quoted will justify my Charge against him. He speaks in general, without any Limitation, or Exception. ^s He tells us, that *no Conviction drawn from Reasoning can ever have Force enough to make us virtuous against our Inclinations*; ^t that *the strongest Operations of our Reason can never point out Truth to us in a Light glaring and forcible enough to produce a faithful Martyr*; and a great deal more to the same Purpose. But, perhaps, the Gentleman has only express'd himself unfortunately? Very unfortunately indeed! But let us take the Argument in this other Sense. He has indeed said a great deal to this Purpose, ^u where he declaims copiously on the Uncertainty of *Tradition* and *human Testimony*, and tells us that such Evidence *can never be a sufficient Basis for a Belief, which is to produce a new Course of Life, and an absolute Mastery of our Passions*; ^x *to confirm us stedfast amidst the Rage and Cruelty of malicious Murtherers, and enable us to be faithful to the last to a*

^s Pag. 30. ^t P. 33. ^u P. 31. ^x See p. 34.

persecuted Religion. — But he all this while forgets that a good Christian is fully persuaded of the Truth of Natural Religion, as well as of reveal'd. However weakly therefore his Persuasion of the Truth of the Gospel may be suppos'd to be founded, he stands at least upon the same Footing with the virtuous Heathen. The Argument therefore returns upon our Author. He must either maintain that Virtue among the Heathen was neither reasonable, nor practicable; or he must own that a Christian wants not Motives, which may be a sufficient Balance for present Temptations.

But is it not *Folly* to sacrifice our Lives for an ill-grounded Persuasion? — If we take up this Persuasion through our own Fault, or Neglect, we must so far stand condemn'd of Folly. Here then perhaps may lie the Stress of our Objection. — The *Arguments*, on which *Christianity* is suppos'd to be founded, are at best very uncertain; no wise Man would lay any great Weight on them. Unless therefore the Christian *Martyrs* had some higher Assurance of the Truth of their Profession, than can be had in the Way of *Reason and Argument*, y they could not, nor ought in Prudence to have *encountered the last terrible Consequence* with *such Constancy and Resolution.* — Thus we may suppose our

Author's Argument to run; but then we must expect better Proof of the Uncertainty of our Faith, than only his positive Assertion. ^z He tells us indeed, that *human Testimony is ever liable to Error, as depending only on fallible Authors; and that our Faith is nothing more than the precarious Conjecture of a fallible Judge upon the traditional Testimony of a fallible Witness.* — ^a But I have already shewn, that we may be sufficiently certain of Matters of Fact supported by credible Testimony; and I hope hereafter to shew more fully the Sufficiency of the Gospel-Evidence, and to give every Part of our Author's Argument a distinct Answer.

It may be sufficient at present to leave with the Reader the Answer of the learned Mr. Chillingworth to a like Argument from his Antagonist. — ^b *A pretty Sophism depending upon this Principle, that whosoever possibly may err, he cannot be certain that he doth not err! — A Judge may possibly err in Judgment; can he therefore never have Assurance that he hath judg'd right? A Traveller may possibly mistake his Way, must I therefore be doubtful whether I am in the right Way from my Hall to my Chamber? Or can our London-Carrier have no Certainty in the Middle of the Day, when*

^z Page 31. ^a See before, p. 63. ^b Chillingworth's Works, p. 84, 85.

he is sober and in his Wits, that he is in the Way to London.

But once more, there are some of our Author's Expressions, which will bear perhaps still a different Sense. In *Page 33, &c.* he sets forth how *natural* it is for Men to *dis-trust rational Conviction* in Times of Danger; ^a *to prefer the great Duty of Self-preservation in Uncertainties, and lay but small Stress on their Prejudices and Punctilios under such Disadvantages.* — *Is rational Conviction then founded on Uncertainties and Prejudices?* Or in what Sense are we to take his Words? Would he say, that the Christian Religion is an *Uncertainty*, only a *plausible Hypothesis*? We must, as I said before, desire more than his bare Assertion for it. We affirm, and are ready to prove, ^b that God hath *taken care to proportion the Evidence of the Reward proposed, to the Difficulty of the Duty required*; that the Christian Martyrs *knew whom they had believed*, and ^c *had a fixed and well-grounded Confidence of being happy for ever in another World.* But perhaps our Author may mean, that the Generality of Men are governed by their Passions; and so fond of Life, that a rational Faith, without some other Assistance, will not be effectual to keep them steady in the Practice of Virtue, and constant Profession of

^a P. 34.

^b See p. 30.

^c See p. 35.

Religion;

Religion; if this is his Meaning, I shall not dispute it with him. Mankind are doubtless highly obliged, and the Cause of Virtue greatly indebted to him, for preaching up^d *the great Duty of Self-preservation*, for speaking^e *so feelingly of the Enjoyments of Sense*, for teaching Men *to make sure of present Good, and assuring them they cannot be blamed for their Conduct*. But if this is all he means, pray what is this to his purpose? Is neither Virtue reasonable, nor *Christianity founded on Argument*; because Men are hurried away by *the violent Appetites of depraved Nature*, and find themselves unable to perform what they know to be good?

But is there not then a Necessity of some^f *much higher and surer Principle to bear Men out in such heroick sufferings under the last Extremity of Torture*? So, it seems, this laboured Argument ends at last in proving the Necessity of Revelation and divine Grace; so far then we are agreed; but what is this Principle we both agree to be necessary? Not immediate Inspiration, ^g *to irradiate their Souls at once with a thorough Conviction* of what they were already fully convinced of. No, those who have, upon good Reason, embraced the Gospel, and are fully persuaded of the Truth of it, may yet want Assistance to enable them to act according to that Per-

^d Pag. 34.

^e P. 32.

^f See p. 33.

^g See p. 56.

fuasion. So that our Author, if this is his Meaning, has confounded two things as different as Belief is from Practice, or the Creed from the Commandments.

I have now considered this Passage in every Sense, I think, that the Words will well bear. He has indeed expressed himself so ambiguously, that I cannot easily fix his Meaning. Nor can I comprehend what Ideas he would affix to the Terms — *rational Conviction* — and — *moral Certainty*; which seem with him to signify ^h *Uncertainty*, ⁱ *Prejudices and Punctilios*, ^k *precarious Conjecture*, or, at best, ^l *flattering Likelihoods*, and ^m *plausible Hypotheses*. This Gentleman then must excuse me, if I can call all this eloquent Harangue on the Insufficieny of Reason, by no better a Name than incoherent loose Talk: I cannot indeed see what purpose it can serve, unless it be to weaken the Obligations of Virtue and Honour, and introduce universal Scepticism. At least we may hope, that all wise and good Men will be satisfied with the Evidences of Christianity, when they find they cannot be disputed without depreciating, at the same time, all *moral Certainty*; nor rejected, but on such Principles as are subversive of all natural Religion.

^h Pag. 34.

ⁱ Ibid.

^k P. 31.

^l P. 33.

^m P. 34.

Our Author proceeds next to *confirm his Point by the divine Word it self*. His Proofs from Scripture will be considered in a distinct Chapter: But he afterwards returns again to his first Head ⁿ *to contemplate the Oeconomy of Faith, considered only in the Eye of strict and unassisted Reason* — What he here adds, contains little more than a Repetition of what he had said before, only dressed up in a different Form. I do not think myself obliged to follow him through all his Variety of Expressions; if any thing occurs, which may require further Notice, I shall be ready to attend him.

First then, the Inconsistency of *Faith and Reasoning* are here set down in pretty strong Colours: ° *The Foundation of Philosophy* (we are told) *is all Doubt and Suspicion; as the Foundation of Religion is all Acquiescence and Belief*. — A strange Foundation to build *Philosophy* upon! I thought it had been built upon Axioms and first Principles. But I shall not quarrel with him about an Expression: He means (I suppose) that, in *Philosophy*, *doubting* is always previous to Knowledge; that we must suspect all *Opinions contracted by Education*, and *shake Hands fairly* (as he ^p elsewhere expresses it) *with all we have been taught*. — But we must say (with his and *Des-Cartes's* good Leave) that there is

no Occasion for this. We may (as has been already shewn) freely and impartially examine into the Truth of our Opinions, without either *suspecting* or *doubting* of them. An impartial Enquiry may, in some Sense, be said to be the *Foundation* of true *Philosophy*; and so is it of true *Religion* too. But perhaps our Author would say, that, in *Religion*, we are to take every thing upon trust, and in *Philosophy* nothing. — *Belief is the Foundation of Religion*. Very well; but what is this *Belief* founded upon? We say upon Reason and Argument. But this Writer cannot distinguish between the Truth of the Gospel in general, and the Truth of its particular Doctrines. In Matters of Faith the first Point of Enquiry is into the Authority of the Revelation. Here let the Enquirer examine with the same Freedom and Impartiality as he does into any Point of *Philosophy*. Let him, if he pleases, be *all Doubt and Suspicion*, provided that his *Doubts and Suspicions* are ready to give way to reasonable Evidence. But when this Point is once proved, then indeed we are to believe the Doctrines contained in that Revelation on the Authority of the Revealer. And surely it is but reasonable so to do. Reason teaches us, that *God cannot lye*; and therefore both authorizes and obliges us to assent to every Doctrine which he has revealed. Such a *Faith* then is the *Faith* of Reason, a
Faith

Faith worthy of a *Philosopher*, and consistent with the Rules of *Philosophy*.

Our Author pursues the same Argument, where he represents *the religious Man* and *the Philosopher*, as two Species of Men necessarily opposite; and their Qualifications, on both Sides, as so many natural and insuperable Impediments in their Way, to hinder even a Possibility of any Approach or Accommodation. The religious Man is (it seems) conscious that he is possessed already of the one thing necessary; and therefore contemns very justly all meaner Pursuits, which might possibly, by any Means, divert his Mind from intending, with all its Powers, the only Science deserving of his Application or Regard. But, with the Philosopher, moral Relations are the general Touch-stone for Trial of all Truths that come in his Way; and Revelation itself stands or falls in his Opinion only, so far as it agrees with this pre-conceived Standard. But he has misrepresented both the Christian and the Philosopher. The religious Man has no Reason (as I know of) to condemn any Part of useful Knowledge. If his Capacity and Circumstances will permit, he may make himself Master of every Art and Science; and he will find, that such Knowledge will rather assist him in, than divert him from the Pursuit of the one thing

necessary. But suppose a Man so wholly to *intend* the Business of *Religion*, as to neglect or condemn the Studies of *Philosophy*; what *Philosophy* is it that such a Man *contemns*? He thinks perhaps he has no Occasion to be an accurate Naturalist, an acute Metaphysician, or a deep Mathematician. But *moral Philosophy*, I should think, he might lawfully apply himself to; this is a Part, an essential and fundamental Part of his *Religion*. He is not, I hope, to discard Reason and common Sense. He may think his *Religion founded on Argument*, and may study and understand the Reasons and Proofs on which it is built.

Again, who is this *Philosopher*, who makes *moral Relations the Touch-stone for the Trial of all Truths that come in his Way*? What, will he believe no Facts, give Credit to no Testimony? He must be a strange sort of *Philosopher*, I believe the late *moral Philosopher*. But if he is really, as his Title imports, a *Lover of Wisdom*, he will be glad to come at *Truth* any way, and will be willing to try every kind of *Truth* by its proper *Test*. Now this is all we desire of him. Let him examine the Evidences of Christianity by the same *Touch-stone* as he tries other Truths of the same Nature; and, if they will stand the Trial, I hope he will readily admit them. Is he *fond of regular Argument*? He will find it among the Advocates
for

for Christianity? Is he *violently attached to certain established Tests*? Let him first take care, that these *Tests* are true and certain; and I will venture to answer for it, that Christianity shall not contradict them. Are *moral Relations his Touch-stone for the Trial of Truth*? Let him apply his *Touch-stone* as far as it is capable of being rightly applied; let him firmly believe, and conscientiously practise every thing that results from any known *moral Relation*; let him admit nothing that contradicts any *moral Relation*, and I will again answer for it, that both the Evidence and the Doctrines of the Gospel will endure this *Touch-stone*.

In another Place we are told,^s that *Defences of religious Tenets proceed in a quite different Style from that of any other Logick one meets with; and that such a kind of Reasoning is avowed upon this Subject as goes directly opposite to every other Species of Argument that carries the Name.* — I know not how to answer him, 'till he will first inform me what *kind of Reasoning* this is, and who *avows* it. But I would suggest a various Reading: For *religious* read *irreligious*. — *ita lege meo periculo.* — These kind of Writings, and particularly the Treatise before me, abound with a sort of *Logick* one seldom meets with elsewhere; and 'tis well

known there is a kind of Reasoning called *Ridicule*, which has been avowed upon this Subject; which certainly goes directly opposite to every other Species of Argument that carries the Name.

^t Our Author proceeds to observe, that the Study of the *Mathematicks*, in particular, is frequently found to have a Tendency to the creating an infidel Turn in the Mind. — If such an Observation has been made, I hope 'tis without Reason and Justice. Sure I am, that there is nothing in the Gospel inconsistent with any mathematical Truth. No Mathematician can have any just Objection against Christianity; nor have Divines any Reason, as I know of, to condemn the Study of the *Mathematicks*.

^u But *Mathematicians* are apt to contract a Disregard for any other kind of Evidence, than such as they are used to meet in that favourite Science. — They must be very wrong-headed *Mathematicians* that can think in this manner; and we must blame them, not the *Mathematicks*, nor the Gospel. I hope this Gentleman will allow, that *Mathematicians* may be good Physicians; but if they will admit of no Evidence short of mathematical Demonstration, I am sure they are not fit to practise.

^w But we are told, there never was in

Faët any right Understanding betwixt the Professors of Religion and Philosophy: — the Philosopher insolently scoffing the Believer; and he, in his Turn, as zealously proscribing the Philosopher. — What? Does this Gentleman take himself, and his Club, for the only *Philosophers* upon Earth? Were not *Bacon*, and *Locke*, and *Ray*, and *Newton* Christians? Has not he himself put us in Mind, that * *our great Philosopher Mr. Boyle* instituted and endowed Lectures in Favour of Revelation? Produce, Sir, if you can, a List of infidel *Philosophers* worthy to be mentioned the same Day with these. None of these *Philosophers* ever *scoffed* at the Gospel, or its *Believers*; and, I hope, no rational Christian will ever *proscribe them*, or their Philosophy. Christian Writers may have bestowed their Censures on false *Philosophy*, and set forth the Weakness and Insufficiency of human Reason; but they could distinguish between true *Philosophy*, and that which falsely usurps the Name; between making Reason no Rule at all in Matters of Religion, and making it the only and adequate Standard of Truth. If any good Christians have gone beyond this, I am no way concerned to vindicate all that they have said. I may have a just Esteem for the Abilities of ^y Lord *Bacon*, or the Learning and Piety of ^z Bishop

* Pag. 86.

^y See p. 70.

^z See p. 103, 104.

Beverege, without thinking myself obliged to stand up in Defence of every Syllable they have writ. Christianity is not answerable for all the extravagant Notions, or unwarrantable Expressions of its pious Votaries, any more than Philosophy is for all the Errors and Absurdities of its learned Professors.

But, it seems, ^a *the Wisdom of Man has ever been reputed Foolishness with God, and his Servants, and, but too often, the Censure has been (however vainly) retorted.* — We are highly obliged to our Author for owning the *Vanity* of this *retorted Censure*. But he had better have owned, that the whole Quotation was nothing to his purpose. ^b Mr. *Locke* thus comments on the Place, — that by σοφός here the Apostle means a cunning Man in Business, is plain from his Quotation in the next Verse, where the Wise spoken of are the Crafty. — These Philosophers then of our Author prove at last to be only cunning Sharpers and crafty Politicians; *Their Wisdom*, we must own, *has ever been reputed Foolishness with God and his Servants.*

But, with regard to Learning and *Philosophy*, though they naturally tend to exalt and improve our Nature; yet it must be owned, that they may sometimes be productive of bad Effects. They may fill Men

^a Pag. 71. 1 Cor. iii. 19.

^b See *Locke's* Comment.

with Vanity and Self-conceit, and inspire them with an Affectation of Novelty and Singularity. Prejudices and Bigotry too often take Possession not only of the Blind and Ignorant, but of the Wise and Learned. We frequently see the Philosopher as stiffly attached to the Tenets of his Sect, or perhaps to some *Nostrum* of his own, as any of the Vulgar can be to their Guides and Leaders. Nay, 'tis not uncommon for Men, of a *subtle Spirit and a penetrating Genius*, to overlook plain Proof, and maintain the most glaring Absurdities. We have seen many Instances of this in Matters of Philosophy: That *the State of Nature is a State of War*; that *all Things exist necessarily*; that *Matter can think*; that *the World was made by a fortuitous Concourse of Atoms*; that *private Vices are publick Benefits*, and many other extravagant Notions, have been warmly maintained by some of the Philosophers, which would scarce ever have entered into the Head of a common Person. We ought not then to wonder, if the same Cause may sometimes have produced the same Effects in Matters of Religion. We acknowledge that Men of Genius and Learning have troubled the Church with many Disputes and Divisions; nay, we farther acknowledge, that a free Use of Reason (especially if not guided by Humility, Discretion, and Virtue) has sometimes led Men into dangerous Errors.

Those

Those who do not think at all, are in less Danger of thinking wrong; they can, however, fall into no Error but what their Guides lead them into. We own then (and our Author may triumph, if he pleases, in the Concession) that from the Use of Philosophy and Learning have sprung many, or most of ^c *the various Denominations of heretical Chimeras and Absurdities that have ever infested the Peace of Christ's Church with the Alarms of Faction and Controversy.* And what then? Is all this any Objection against, any Disparagement to Learning or Philosophy? ^d *The youngest Pupil of Philosophy* might have taught our Author, that the Use of a thing is not to be laid aside, because it has been, and may be abused; that 'tis often the Fate of the best things to be made an ill Use of; Health, and Light, and Liberty, as well as Knowledge.

And what is here said may help to account for what our Author objects in the next Place. — ^e *If this Christian System* (he says) *had proceeded on rational Principles, it could never certainly have laboured under all that Contempt in the Eyes of the lettered World, which it did.* — ^f *For you see your Calling, Brethren* (says St. Paul) *how that not many wise Men after the Flesh are called, — But*

^c See p. 85.^d See p. 8.^e P. 71.^f P. 80. 1 Cor. i. 26.

he may answer himself: — *“The ablest and best of Men are sometimes disqualified for fair Reasoning by their natural Prejudices. — A thousand strong Impressions already sunk deep into their Mind, a thousand natural Attachments to Customs, Persons, and Things, may put it out of their Power to make equitable Decisions in Cases, where the Interests of any of these Favourites are concerned. — As long as Men are subject to the Influence of Passions, as well as Reason, such a calm and Stoical Conduct is not to be expected; or that the Cause of the Stranger should have all this rigid Justice and strict Regard that looks so becoming in Theory, paid to its Pretensions and Merit.*

Besides, there may be particular Reasons assigned, why Christianity was not likely to meet with a favourable Reception among the Philosophers of that Age. Several of them indeed were Men of true Learning, and sound Judgment; and some of them did actually embrace the Christian Profession. But then it is well known, that Pride, and Arrogance, and a supercilious Contempt of the Vulgar, were too common Ingredients in the Philosophy of those Times. A blind Attachment to the Principles of their Sect; Art and Subtlety in defending and disputing for those Principles, were the

usual Qualifications of the *wise Men* among the *Greeks*. Add to this, that several of the Tenets of the Philosophers were highly absurd and impious, and the Lives of many of them very immoral. No Wonder then, *that the Cause of the Stranger* should meet with but little *Justice* from such *Judges*; no Wonder they should give but little Attention to a Company of mean and illiterate Men, who taught nothing but plain Doctrine, set off with no Ornaments of Rhetorick, or Arts of Sophistry, and supported by nothing but plain Facts. It could not, in the Nature of Things, be expected, that such Men should easily be persuaded to forsake their beloved Vices, recant their favourite Principles, and quit all their Pretensions to Wisdom. Persons of a meaner Education were likely to be more humble, and teachable, and better disposed to hearken to the Truth, and weigh its Evidences, than those, who were thus conceited, and fond of their own Wisdom. For the Evidences of Christianity, though rational and conclusive, were yet adapted to the Capacity of the Vulgar; it required no Depth of Learning to understand them, but only an honest and unprejudiced Mind to receive them.

^a Our Author adds, that *Christianity had all the Advantage of coming on the Stage at*

a Time of Day, when Reason was in the highest Request and Reputation: — but what he would infer from thence I am quite at a Loss to apprehend. Did not Christianity spread, and gain Ground in that enquiring Age, and does not this afford a strong Presumption of it's Truth and Excellence? Had the Gospel made it's first Appearance in a dark and ignorant Age, would not this have been made a strong Objection against it? Would not our Author himself have triumph'd greatly in such an Argument? Would he not from thence have concluded (and that with some Colour of Reason) that Christianity was not founded on Argument, or supported by Evidence; but that ^b Ignorance was its Mother, and the Superstition of a dark Age bred and nurs'd it up. But, it seems, 'tis all one with him; he can argue which way he pleases. — The Gospel came on the Stage in a learned Age — But, it seems, they were not so to learn Christ, and that Religion and Science were, as I contend, two very remote and different Subjects. — Q. E. D. — I have often met with Premisses, that have stood at a considerable Distance from the Conclusion; but 'tis not so common to bring Premisses to establish a Conclusion, which, if they infer any Thing, infer just the contrary.

We come now to Page 81, where we have a strange Argument, or rather a Series of strange

^b See p. 82.

Assertions, unsupported by any Proof. ° We are told, that *even upon the plainest Question in Nature, the Existence of a Deity itself, all the labour'd Productions of Dr. Clarke himself have rather contributed to make for the other Side of the Question, and rais'd a thousand new Difficulties in the Reader's Mind, which would never else have occur'd to him.* Again — ° *the very bearing these Subjects canvass'd freely, though never so much to their Advantage in Point of Argument, is in itself a very dangerous Practice, and a great Weakening to all religious Attachments, which are establish'd on so much a better Ground.* — I have frequently had Occasion to complain, that our Author really strikes at all Natural Religion, while he aims only at Reveal'd; but I am afraid I must retract what I have said; what he here advances will scarce admit of so favourable a Construction. He seems to me, to aim here directly and professedly at all Natural Religion. He plainly tells us now, that the Belief of a God is *not founded on Argument*, no more than *Christianity*. All Proofs of his *Existence* are not only superfluous, but *dangerous*. We must not argue that every Effect must have a Cause; we cannot from the Order, Beauty, and exquisite Contrivance of the Works of the Creation, infer the Wisdom, the Power, the Goodness, nor even the Existence of the Crea-

tor. *The Heaven's declare not the Glory of God ; and the Firmament sheweth not his Handy-Work.* Does he imagine that such Doctrine, as this, will be admitted on his bare Assertion? Ought he not rather to think it must provoke the Indignation and Contempt of every wise and virtuous Man? But, perhaps, he will tell us that he has *establis'd* both Natural and Reveal'd Religion upon *better Grounds?* What *better Grounds?* Are Men to be left to Nature? ^d Will they *naturally believe the Existence of a Deity, if left fairly to themselves and uninstructed?* and can what is natural be unreasonable? Will Instruction fill Men with nothing but *little Doubts and Scruples?* and Reason *obscure, and render suspected* the Voice of Nature? Or is it the Property of rational Beings, instead of being convinc'd by good Reason and conclusive Arguments, to be ^d *dissatisfied,* and left in a lower *Degree of Persuasion,* than they were before? ^e This Gentleman has indeed told us, that the best Arguments, *instead of availing to convince his Reason, have just a contrary Effect upon him;* but I hope, there are not many of this *Antichristian Complexion.* But perhaps immediate Inspiration, ^f *a constant and particular Revelation imparted to every Individual, will teach us what Reason cannot.* But here

^d P. 81.

^e P. 21.

^f P. 112.

again, the same Questions return. Can what is thus taught by immediate Revelation be unreasonable, or will sound Reason and good Argument, instead of confirming, *obscure and render suspected* this Voice of God? Besides, the Being of a God, as it is confessedly *the plainest Question in Nature*, and therefore stands in need of no Revelation to teach it us, so the Belief of it must be antecedent to the Belief of any Revelation, whether mediate, or immediate. The Person, who finds, or fancies himself inspir'd, must first believe that there is a God, and that what comes from him is true. He must admit this, or else he can have no Motive to believe, or comply with this Inspiration; unless you will suppose, that God acts upon him, as a mere Machine; and then he must be incapable, either of Will, or Understanding, or Belief. The Existence of a God must be prov'd by Reason, or it cannot be prov'd at all. To tell us then ^h that all Arguments for the Belief of a God, *have rather contributed to make for the other Side of the Question*, is to subvert all Religion, and leads directly to Atheism and Scepticism.

But have not the most ^h *labour'd* Defences of these great Truths often *raised a thousand new Difficulties in Mens Minds, which would never else have occur'd to them?* — Perhaps

they may, unskilfully and unreasonably applied. When we speak to plain Men, we ought to use plain Arguments. If instead of this we puzzle them with needless Subtleties, or amuse ourselves with answering far-fetch'd Objections, which they would otherwise never have thought of, we may, perhaps, leave them more dissatisfied, than we found them. But this is our Fault. *The plainest Question in Nature* may be perplex'd and obscur'd by an aukward and unskilful Defence of it. These great Truths, are supported by plain Proofs; these alone are proper, and these are sufficient to satisfy common Persons. But if your *Hobbes's* and *Spinoza's* shall endeavour to puzzle this clear Cause with Sophistry and Fallacy, I hope there never will be wanting *Clarkes* and *Cumberlands* among us, who will be able to unravel their Fallacies, and follow them through all their Windings and Doublings; to prove the same Truth different Ways, and place it in every Point of Light.

We come next to consider another Passage very much of the same Stamp with the former. Our Author (it seems) *cannot avoid regarding Mr. Boyle's Lectures, as a very principal Cause of the present prevailing Disposition and Turn to Infidelity.* — He could not well have pitch'd on a more unfortunate Instance. The

ⁱ P. 85, 86.

very Name of *Boyle* must put every Reader in Mind, that Reason and Religion may dwell amicably together ; that Learning, Philosophy, Honour, Virtue, and Piety may all be united, and center in the same Person. This great and good Philosopher ^k *had* indeed *experienc'd a vast Reach and Energy in Human Reason*; but he did not ^l *fondly imagine that her Power was universal, or that there was no Object too great for her Cognizance.* He thought that the Christian Faith might be establish'd by Reason and Argument, without attempting to square the Subject of it to the Capacity of our Understandings. His Design has been executed with a Success answerable to the Wisdom and Piety of the Institution. This *strong Instance*, as our Author calls it, *of the irreconcilable Repugnance betwixt Reason and Belief* happens to be one of the strongest Demonstrations, he could well have produc'd, of their Agreement and Affinity. Every one of these Lectures bears full Testimony against him, and proves beyond all reasonable Exception, that *Christianity is founded on Argument.* It is very surprizing, that our Author should delight in mentioning those very Books, which overthrow his whole Scheme. He is perpetually putting us in Mind of *the Tryal of the Witnesses, the Analogy of Reason and Revela-*

^k See p. 86. ^l See p. 87.

tion, Mr. Boyle's *Lectures*, &c. Surely, they run strangely in his Head; I am afraid they trouble his Conscience. May we not justly suspect, that he is angry with these excellent Writers, for demonstrating the great Truths of Religion too plainly? *They speak sound Speech, that cannot be condemn'd; but he that is of the contrary Part is not asham'd to put Nonsense into their Mouths, and then exclaim grievously against the* ^m *Medley of Inconsistency and Contradiction* himself has jumbled together. A fair Answer to any one of these Defences of our Religion, would be indeed of some Service to Infidelity; but does he think, that we will be contented with his asserting roundly and confidently, that ⁿ *this Scheme has in the Event prov'd radically injurious to the Cause of Piety, and instrumental in the unbinging of all religious Principles?* Are these Writers Arguments inconclusive? let him say so, and prove what he says. But, if they are conclusive, one would think they should confirm, and not *injure the Cause of Piety*. I hope then I may have the same Liberty of asserting, (and I doubt not but Truth and Fact will justify me) that these excellent Performances have greatly strengthen'd the Cause of Religion in the Eyes of all sober and judicious Persons: But, if there be Men,

^m See p. 88.

ⁿ P. 86.

° on whom Demonstration has a quite *contrary Effect*, who can help it?

But do we not complain of the Growth of Infidelity? Yes, and so we do of Vice too; and perhaps this Gentleman may be of Opinion, that the many excellent Sermons preach'd against all Manner of Vice and Immorality may be the *principal Cause* of it.

Here is again, a plain Proof of our Author's great Regard for natural Religion. Many of the Sermons preach'd at Mr. Boyle's Lecture, are levell'd against Atheism. The Being of a God is there demonstrated, and the Principles and Obligations of Natural Religion set forth. But these too (for our Author takes them in all, without Distinction) have, it seems, been ^p *injurious to the Cause of Piety, and instrumental in the unbinging of all religious Principles.* ^q *The labour'd Productions of Dr. Clarke, have rather contributed to make for the other Side of the Question; Bentley, by shewing the Folly of Atheism, has pav'd the Way to it; and Derham, by displaying the Wisdom of the Creation, has taught Men to deny their Creator.* ^r *The Cause goes still the backwarder for all their Labours; and Atheism still reigns triumphant. What must we call a Man, that can argue in this Manner? Is he really an Atheist? or is*

° See p. 21.

^p P. 86.

^q P. 81.

^r P. 86.

he only an humourous Sceptick, who takes delight to puzzle and amuze Mankind, without considering, or caring what he says? The Being of a God (as I just now said) must be proved by Reason, or not at all; and if these Writers Arguments will not convince us of it, I really know not what will.

But what is it he has to charge these *reasoning Preachers* with? Has he any thing to object against their Doctrine, or the Arguments they bring to support it? If he has, he chuses to keep it to himself. — ^a But they bid us *all judge freely for ourselves*; and yet expect we should *all judge just as they do*. — On this Topick our Author declaims very plausibly for several Pages together; but one easy Distinction will cut the Sinews of all this specious Harangue. — These *rational Divines* expect no Deference to their Authority, but only to the Reasons they bring. — The one they neither have, nor pretend any Claim to; the other is no more than what all Mankind require and expect. Every one, who undertakes to demonstrate a Proposition, expects that others should be convinced by his Demonstration. He who brings good Reasons for any thing, expects that Men should hearken to Reason, and thinks he has a Right, ^b if *not to be angry*, yet at least to complain of their Perverseness, if they

^a Pag. 87.

^b See p. 93.

do not. If a Jury bring in a Verdict against plain and full Evidence, all the World will complain of their *Decisions*, and suspect they are under the Influence of some corrupt Motive. In short (° as I have said before) in all our Communications one with another, we suppose Men capable of understanding plain Proof, and obliged to submit to it. Men indeed may be, and often are, over-confident; they call that Reason and Demonstration, which is not so. But then we ought to disprove their Arguments, and shew the Weakness of their pretended Demonstrations, before we can have any Right to complain of their Confidence. While these *Preachers* Arguments therefore continue in full Force, unanswered, and unanswerable, they may reasonably expect Men should be convinced by them. Shew me, if you can, Sir, where any one of these Preachers has challenged any other^d *Attention*, or *Deference to his Dictates*. They do not desire to be believed upon their bare *Authority*; nor expect that all your Attempts for Information should be under their Tuition and Direction. They have left the Enquiry as open and free as can be desired; they conceal no Facts, deny no Means of Information, nor have they shut up any of the Avenues of Enquiry. ° They do not throw out Volumes of mysteri-

° See above p 61, 62.

^d See p. 89, 90.

° See p. 92.

ous and profound Queries undecyphered into the Market-place; they deal in plain Truths, and plain Proofs, that need no *Decypherer*; and only expect *the good Company* should believe their own Eyes, and not wilfully shut them against the Light. ^f They allow you to *contradict them in earnest*, and wish you would do it *in earnest*; they will not be angry with you for *disputing against them*; they only desire you would do it with Decency, Sobriety, and Sincerity. But if Men cannot offer Objections against a *Law*, without *flying in the Face of it*; nor give their Reasons against an *Establishment*, without *affronting it*; if, instead of answering our Arguments, and *bringing forth their strong Reasons*, they oppose us with Calumny and Falshood, Buffoonry and Ridicule, wilful and notorious Misrepresentations of Scripture and its Doctrines; if every Art is judged lawful, and every Disguise becoming; and no Regard thought due to Decency, or Morality, or the first Principles of natural Religion, we have then surely but too much Reason to *complain*, not against *Liberty*, but the Abuse of it.

But to illustrate this Matter still farther, let us suppose that Mr. *Boyle*, instead of endowing Lectures in Favour of Religion, had founded a Course of Experimental Philoso-

^f See p. 95, 96.

phy. His Lecturers would then, I suppose, have shewed their Experiments, and given People Liberty to make use of their Eyes, and *judge freely for themselves*. But, after they had proved a thing by plain and undeniable Experiments, they would certainly have expected they should *all judge just as they did*, not on their Authority, or bare Assertion, but on the Experiments and Proofs they brought. Let us then only farther suppose (and 'tis no very extravagant Supposition) that these Gentlemen have demonstrated the Truth of Religion as clearly; and then why may they not expect People should be convinced in one Case, as well as in the other. There is indeed some Difference in the two Cases. Mr. Boyle's Discoveries in Philosophy, though useful and important, are not of the same Importance as the Truths of Religion; nor are Men under such Obligation to enquire, or judge about them. But God may reasonably expect we should attend to what concerns his Will, and our own Salvation. If in these Points we err through Inattention, or Prejudice, we must be answerable to him for our Negligence and Perverseness.

^a *But Freedom (we are told) is the greatest Jest imaginable, when tendered with the least Air of Authority and Restriction. — I*

really always thought that *Freedom* subject to no *Authority* or *Restriction*, was the very Definition of Licentiousness. God has given us Reason and Liberty; but we are accountable to him for the Use of them. He has allowed, and commanded us to enquire freely; but he expects such Enquiries should be guided by Sincerity, and determined by Evidence. Such Liberty we have in Religion; no greater can we have, or desire in Philosophy. *A Charter of Liberty*, without such a *Proviso*, destroys itself.

Another Charge against these reasoning Preachers, is, that they ^b pretend to *set up for Guides without Infallibility*. — What? must all School-masters and Tutors; nay, all Pilots, Coachmen, and Post-boys be then infallible? I should think a Person sufficiently qualified to be *my Guide*, if he knew his Way; nay, I might sometimes be glad to accept of a *Guide*, who knew it but a little better than myself. Some Persons have suspected, that this Writer was a *Jesuit* in Disguise; and it must be owned, that several of his Tenets look very much that way. He here tells us, that ^c *actual Infallibility is the only Title whereon to ground any plausible Claim to our Discipleship*: In another Place he tells us ^d *in plain Terms, that Ignorance is the Mother of all Devotion*; and that the

^b Pag. 90.

^c Ibid.

^d P. 82.

looking presumptuously into the Ark of God, that is, enquiring into the Truth of Religion, has ever proved a fatal Curiosity. It is the whole Tenor of his Book to decry a rational Faith; and teach us, that ^e it is not the proper Province of Reason to judge at all of religious Matters. Nor is it the first time that our Church has been attacked by Persons of that Society under the Mask of Enthusiasm; and they know very well what they do. If they can once convince Men there is no Certainty without Infallibility (which is the main Drift of most of our Author's Arguments) when their Brain begins to cool, they will naturally seek for that Infallibility elsewhere, which they cannot find in themselves. If they can prevail upon them to give up their Reason, and quit the Rock on which they stand secure, they may hope to persuade them, after they are sufficiently tired with driving before the Wind, that the Church of Rome is the only anchoring Place, where they may find a sure Bottom. But what are our Author's Principles, or whether he has any, I pretend not to determine. I am concerned only with his Reasonings. And here he tells us that ^f actual Infallibility is the only Title whereon to ground any plausible Claim to our Discipleship. — What Idea our Author has

^e Pag. 7.^f P. 90.

annexed to the Word *Discipleship*, I know not; nor what he means by ^g *the true Spirit of Discipleship*, which he elsewhere seems to recommend to us. But, I hope, a Man, who understands any Branch of Knowledge, may presume to teach it, and may retain Scholars, or *Disciples*, without pretending to *actual* Infallibility. We may ^h give a Reason of the Hope that is in us with Meekness; and lay before Men the Proof of our Religion, without usurping the Title of *infallible Dictators*. And what have these *Preachers* done more? ⁱ They pretend not to give a *peremptory and magisterial Decision of Things* in any one's Name; they desire no one to believe the Truth of Christianity on their Authority; they offer their Reasons, and leave Men to judge of them. But perhaps some Divines have gone farther; they have *set up for Guides*, which they cannot pretend to do *without Infallibility*; for as long as the *Guides* we employ are liable to be mistaken themselves, we can never have any sufficient Foundation or Insurance for our Dependance on a safe Conduct. — A fine Sophism this, depending upon this Principle, that there can be no Certainty without Infallibility, which is the very Sum and Substance of Scepticism. He who is liable to be mistaken in any thing, is liable to be

^g Page 28.

^h 1 Pet. iii. 15.

ⁱ See p. 91.
mistaken

mistaken in every thing; we must believe no Man, let his Skill and Integrity be ever so apparent; we must depend upon no Man's Advice or Authority, though in his proper Art and Province. And thus we shall happily get rid of all our Divines; and, at the same time, of all our Lawyers and Physicians. But we cannot pitch upon a better Instance, than what our Author has here kindly furnished us with, that of *a Guide*. No *Guide* pretends to *actual Infallibility*; therefore he is *liable to be mistaken*, when he conducts us through a Road he has travelled a thousand times. All *Pilots* are fallible Men; therefore when we employ an experienced and authorized Pilot, *we can never have any sufficient Foundation or Insurance for our Dependence on a safe Conduct*.

Another Complaint our Author makes, is, that ^k *these Men presume to lavish their Wrath against the very Term of Free-thinking*. — Surely this Gentleman has never read these Performances he so freely censures. Most of the Apologies for Christianity, which I have met with, recommend and encourage *Free-thinking*, and often in express Terms. But if the Word *Free-thinker* is become a Proverb of Reproach, 'tis owing to those who have, without any Title, usurped the Name, or abused the Privilege. The Words

^k Page 91.

Villain and *Knave* were once very innocent Appellations, but have degenerated through the Wickedness of those who bore them. Nay, the Words *Saint* and *Righteous* have, through the Hypocrisy of some among us, been converted into Proverbs of Reproach. If then the Term *Free-thinker* has shared the same Fate, those, who have been pleased to dignify themselves with this Title, exclusive of the rest of Mankind, have no body to blame but themselves.

But I have passed by a curious Argument, which I must not forget to pay a proper Respect to. — ¹ *He that will allow me the Liberty* (says our Author) *of sifting and controverting it at my Pleasure, mistakes the very main End and Design of Religion, which was calculated on purpose to restrain and compose the turbulent Spirit of Dissension, and to prevent wrangling. Religion, a pacifick Institution, abhors all Disputes, &c.* — I was in Hopes I might have enquired into the Truth of my Religion without *wrangling*. But what does this Writer mean? Is it *the very main End and Design of Religion* to prevent all Enquiries into its own Truth? Was *Jesus Christ* sent into the World, not to prove his divine Mission, but to let Men know, he had no Proof to produce, and forbid them to ask any Questions

¹ Page 83.

about it? Or was it *the Design of Religion* to give us such a *general Rule of Faith*, as should *prevent* all other Controversies? For this very Reason the Truth and Certainty of this *Rule* ought to be the more strictly and carefully examined. But the Truth is, the Gospel does not require *all Men* to be *entirely of the same Mind*. All Things necessary to be believed are plain. In other Things Men may, and will differ; but they ought not, and need not break through the Rules of Peace and Charity. It is our own Fault, if our *Disputes gender Strifes and Parties, Wrangling and Dissension*.

I come now to our Author's concluding Argument, which is ^m *to come still closer, if possible, to the Point, and speak home once for all*. — It may be indeed *possible* for him *to come still closer to the Point*, and yet be very wide of it still. But this *home* Proof is little more than a Repetition of what he had said before, *Pages 88, 113, 114*. The Substance of what he so largely descants upon, as far as I can make it out, is as follows: — Examination into Religion can leave ⁿ *a baptized and habitual Believer* no better than it found him, and may leave him worse. If, after such an Examination, he is convinced of the Truth of his Religion, he is only *fixed where he was before, and his Labours,*

at best, are but superfluous. ° But if, after all, the powerful Evidence, on the Side of Religion, should fail in its Influence, and the specious Glosses of Infidelity should unhappily misguide our Reason, the Consequence is fatal: For there is no Provision made, either by God or Man, for sincere Infidelity. — But all this specious Reasoning proceeds upon two Suppositions, both of which we must beg Leave to call in Question. It supposes, first, the Consequence of a fair Enquiry quite uncertain and precarious. But we cannot think, that *human Reason*, though not the adequate^p Standard of Truth, is yet so uncertain a Scale, as our Author would persuade us; we cannot but be of Opinion, that the Evidences of Christianity are sufficient to satisfy every careful and impartial Enquirer. Another thing here supposed is, that the Christian, who, without any Enquiry, takes his Religion upon Trust, is innocent and safe in so doing. But we maintain, that 'tis every Man's Duty, who has Leisure and Ability, to enquire into the Truth of his Religion. If he neglects this, he is guilty of a criminal Omission, however right his Persuasion may happen to be. This Duty indeed of examining into our Religion, must be proportioned to each Man's Opportunities and Abilities. Persons engaged in an

° Pag. 117.

^p See p. 116.

active and busy Life, who want either the Leisure, or the Capacity to make such Enquiries, are under less Obligation to enter into them. God will not *require much*, where he has not *given much*. But ^a *the proud Philosopher*, if he is not able *to give a Reason of the Hope that is in him*, is utterly inexcusable. He has but little Reason to be proud of his *Philosophy*, while he is a Stranger to the truest and most necessary Wisdom. ^r *A refined Genius* indeed, that amuses itself with Trifles, and overlooks *the one thing needful*! A Person of very exalted Speculations, who can extend them no farther than the things of this World! — ^t But *why should the Philosopher affect to be more a Christian than any of his honest Neighbours*? — He is not *more a Christian*, nor has he *another kind of Christianity* than his *Neighbours*, after all his Enquiries: He is only better assured, and, on more rational Grounds, persuaded of the Truth of the same Christianity, which they, in common, believe with him. The Case is the same in natural Religion. The *Philosopher* believes the same God, and practises the same Virtues, as the rest of his *honest Neighbours*; but he understands better the Reasons and Foundations of his Principles, and is better able to solve any Difficulties which may be raised about them. And it is

^a Pag. 114.^r Ibid.^t Ibid.

his Duty so to do. His *refined Genius* and extensive Learning lay him under Obligations, which those of lower Attainments may reasonably stand excused from. If he neglects this Duty, he will not be so good a *Christian* as the rest of his *Neighbours*. He ought not to be *contented* with the same Knowledge as his *Sister*, or his *Mother*; if he is, they will be not only *equally*, but better entitled to *all the Means of Grace, and Hopes of Glory*.

But, to give this concluding Argument all possible Advantage, let us view it in every Light it will bear. First then, let us suppose this honest and diligent Enquirer educated in a wrong Persuasion; it is plain, in this Case, he can lose nothing by his Enquiry. If he continues fixed in his Error, he is certainly no worse than he was before; but, if he finds out his Mistake, he surely can be no Sufferer by doing his Duty, and discovering the Truth. This Supposition, though omitted by our Author, yet ought to be made, because no Man, without Enquiry, can tell whether his Persuasion be right or wrong. Let us then, in the next Place, with our Author, suppose this Enquirer brought up in the true Religion. If his Enquiry confirms him in his Religion (as it may reasonably be hoped it will) he has done his Duty, and has the Satisfaction to find his Faith reasonable, and his *Hope sure and stedfast*. But
if

1 if the artful Representations of the Cause of Error should possibly happen to misguide his Reason, (which yet we think there is but little Danger of) he has still done his Duty, and the Consequences of it cannot be fatal. If there is a Man so weak, as to take *2* the specious Glosses of Infidelity for Demonstration, and not be able to see through the plausible Pretext of their ingenious Sophistry, after a fair and full Enquiry, his Want of Capacity will be his Justification; the Sincerity of his Intention will acquit him, because he has done his best.

But *this* (we are told) is as much as to say, that you will either do what God commands you, or take Care to come prepar'd to justify your Refusal to his Satisfaction; never observing the while that all your Reasonings of this Stamp are grounded upon the monstrous Supposition that God would enjoin a Thing, that you should be able to give solid and substantial Reasons for not complying with. *3* Strangest Delusion sure! to go directly opposite to your Maker's express Command, and yet flatter yourself with the Hopes of being provided with a sufficient Excuse for your Disobedience. — As you, Sir, have all this while so ingeniously personated the Christian, give me Leave now to take the Part of this same sincere Infidel. And under this Character I

1 Page 117.*2* Ibid.*3* P. 118.

must tell you, that you are all this while begging the Question. You suppose God to have commanded me to believe, whereas this is the very Thing in Question. Convince me of this, and my Enquiries will be at an End. I shall neither make, nor desire any *Excuse*; but be ready to obey *my Maker's Command*, as soon as I know what his *Command* is. *All Reasonings of this Stamp* (though I never met with any such before) *are grounded upon this monstrous Supposition*, that a Person should know that God had commanded him to believe, and yet be a sincere Unbeliever. But to speak seriously, where after all is the Absurdity of supposing, that *God should enjoin a Thing*, and yet some Men be *provided with a sufficient Excuse for their Disobedience*? We cannot indeed suppose that *God* would *enjoin* any Thing 'specially to any particular Person, which he knew he could not be reasonably requir'd to *comply with*. But God may give out a general Law, which some particular Persons may by some Accident be incapable of complying with. Should we suppose God on any particular Occasion to command all Men to see, yet surely those, who have no Eyes, may *be able to give solid and substantial Reasons for not complying*. In like Manner, if he commands all Men to believe, yet those, who have no Opportunities of coming to the Knowledge of the Truth, may *be able to justify their Refusal*

to

to his Satisfaction. The Truth is, no Commands, whether Human or Divine, however general, can be suppos'd to extend to such Persons, as are under a natural Incapacity of obeying them.

But our Author argues somewhere, ^b that this is inconsistent with *the Notion of one only true and saving Faith.* — How so! The Truth is *one* and the same, whether Men are capable, or incapable of perceiving it. When we talk of *one only saving Faith*, all we mean is that *Faith in Christ* is the only Means appointed by God, whereby we may acquire a legal Claim, and Covenant-Title to the Privileges of his Gospel. But we do not hereby design to exclude all others from all Hopes of Mercy; much less do we say, that God will punish Men for not believing, when he has given them no sufficient Means of Conviction. ^c But this Point has been already, I hope, sufficiently consider'd.

CHAP. III.

I Have now gone through that Part of our Author's Argument, wherein he seems to place his greatest Confidence, where he thinks ^a *he has acquitted himself beyond all Exception.* If I have *taken from him all his*

^b Page 94. ^c See before, p. 40, &c. ^d P. 106.

Armour, wherein he trusted, I hope I shall more easily be able to disarm him of these Weapons, on which he himself seems not much to depend. It required some Labour to pursue him through all the double and treble Meanings of *ingenious Sophistry*; but I have now little else to do, than to give a fair and just Interpretation of those Scriptures he has misapplied: And I doubt not but I shall find it much easier ^e *to ascertain the just Sense and Meaning* of the Scripture, than that of our Author. He himself indeed, as I said, seems to lay no great Stress on this Part of his Performance. ^f He tells us, that *a critical Punctuality is by no Means his Care*, that it is enough for his Design, if the main Drift and Scope of the Argument is maintain'd only with some tolerable Degree of Propriety, so as to carry just the Face of something plausible and consistent. A fair Confession indeed! Behold here a true Picture of all Infidel Writings. They care not for Exactness, or Punctuality; it is enough for their Design, if what they say carries just the Face of something plausible and consistent. The Subject before us is, one would think, of the highest Importance; the ^g *pointing out the authoriz'd Principle of Faith*; nay, (according to our Author) the Principle of all divine Knowledge, the ^h *only Ground*, where-

^e See p. 36. ^f P. 105. ^g P. 106. ^h See p. 81.

on the Belief of a God can be safely *establish'd*; ^h and *the Intelligence of this Principle*, he himself (speaking of Scripture) tells us, *can proceed from Revelation only*. And yet this Gentleman, on this Subject, shall content himself with quoting ⁱ such *Texts*, as *happen to occur to his Memory*, little concerning himself how he has *mistaken or misapplied them*.—*Tantumne rem tam negligenter!* — But he has acquitted himself so unexceptionably in making good his first Ground, that all farther Care, or *Exactness* is now unnecessary. — The Reader may possibly be of another Opinion. He may, perhaps, think rather, that his Apology ought to have been more general, and extended to his whole Performance. He may have already met with ^k *Inadvertencies*, for which the Author ought to have *bespoke* his Candor, and *courted* his Courtesy. But, it seems, he does not depend on *any of the particular Texts* he has quoted; ^l there are other *innumerable Passages* throughout the whole Scripture, that concur in proving his Point; and his Argument ^m depends on the joint Tenor and Tendency of the whole. — It will be Time enough to consider those other *innumerable Passages*, when he thinks fit to produce them; but to fly for Refuge to the general Tenor of the

^h Page 106, 107.ⁱ P. 105.^k P. 105.^l P. 56, 57.^m P. 106.

whole Scripture seems to be rather giving up his Point, than proving it. At least, we must wait till he is pleas'd to favour us with a new Comment on *the great Original*, which will shew us this *joint Tendency*, and discover, what no Mortal yet has ever been able to see there. All we can do at present, is, to examine those Proofs from Scripture, he has thought proper to alledge, and leave it to the Reader to judge, whether they can be said even to carry the Face of any Thing plausible, or consistent. ⁿ And here *he apprehends he has little more to do, than to collect all those Expressions, that treat of the Nature of Faith, — such as —* ^o *Lest they should understand with their Hearts; —* ^p *Their foolish Heart was darken'd; —* ^q *Purified their Hearts by Faith. — Expressions applicable with no Propriety to the intellectual Faculty, but evidently descriptive of the Will only. —* He begins like an able Commentator, throughly vers'd in Scripture-Language. — The Word *Heart* is, it seems, always used to signify *the Will only*. — What then does he think of these Expressions? — ^r *Why reason ye these Things in your Hearts? —* ^s *Why do Thoughts arise in your Hearts? —* ^t *All Men mus'd in their Hearts of John. —* ^u *God fill'd Bezaleel and Aholiab with Wisdom*

ⁿ Pag. 36. ^o Matt. xiii. 15. ^p Rom. i. 21. ^q Acts xv. 9.

^r Mar. ii. 8. ^s Luke xxiv. 38. ^t Luke iii. 15,

^u Exod. xxxv. 35.

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of Heart to work all Manner of Work; —
^x *God respecteth not any that are wise of Heart. — But, supposing these Expressions were designed to be descriptive of the Will, y it has been already shewn that our Assent depends very much upon our Will; and that Faith may with great Propriety be attributed to the Heart, consider'd as the Will, and yet be a Rational Faith.*

^z In the next Place, our Author refers us to the plain narrative Part of the Gospel-History, from whence, he tells us, it appears that our Saviour did not lay the Arguments and Proofs of his Mission before his Disciples, nor give them Time to consider calmly of their Force, and Liberty to determine thereon, as their Reason should direct them. — ^a This is, it seems, a Particular, which appears to him entirely uncontrovertible, and on this Circumstance he designs chiefly to rest his Appeal. — Very well — the Cause will then soon be brought to an Issue. Let then the Reader turn to *John* v. Our Saviour there expressly says, — ^b *If I bear Witness of myself, my Witness is not true* — and then he appeals, first to the Testimony of *John*, ^c whom the Jews generally acknowledg'd to be a Prophet sent from God. — *Ye sent unto John, and he bare Witness unto the Truth* — next to the

^x Job xxxvii. 24. ^y See before p. 15, &c. ^z P. 36.
^a Ibid. ^b John v. 31, &c. ^c Matt. xxi. 26.

Evidence of his own Miracles — *the Works that I do, bear Witness of me, that the Father hath sent me.* Lastly, he adds: — *Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal Life, and they are they which testify of me.* — Again, ^d when John the Baptist sent his Disciples to Christ, to ask him — *Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?* — he laid the Arguments and Proofs of his Mission frankly before them. — In that same Hour he cur'd many of their Infirmities and Plagues, and of evil Spirits, and unto many that were blind he gave Sight; and he said unto them — *Go your Way, and tell John what Things ye have seen and heard, how that the Blind see, the Lame walk, the Lepers are cleans'd, the Deaf hear, the Dead are rais'd, to the Poor the Gospel is preach'd.* At another Time he thus bespeaks the Jews, — ^e *The Works that I do in my Father's Name, they bear Witness of me.* — *If I do not the Works of my Father, believe me not; but if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the Works: That ye may know and believe that the Father is in me, and I in him.* — And after his Ascension his Apostles appealed to the same Works, as Proofs of his Mission. St. Peter, discoursing with the Jews, makes this Appeal to their Knowledge and Understanding. — ^f *Jesus of Nazareth, a Man ap-*

^d Luke vii. 19. ^e John v. 25, 37, 38. ^f Acts ii. 22.

prov'd of God among you by Miracles, and Wonders, and Signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know.

—^s Many more Instances, were there Occasion, might be produc'd to the same Purpose. What shall we then say to a Writer, who will assert so confidently, what has not the least Foundation in Fact; what every one, who ever read over the Gospel-History must know to be false? ⁱ May the *candid* and *courteous* Reader overlook all his *Inadvertencies* and *Errors*, in *Point of strict Criticism*; but I hope he will not *court his Courtesy* so far, as to *apply for a formal Indemnity* for notorious and palpable Falshoods.

Let us however hear what he has to say against such plain Proof. ^k First then, he tells us, that ^l *Christ taught his Disciples, as one having Authority; as one who deriv'd from Heaven the Instructions he was communicating; as a Master; who had a Right to dictate and prescribe to his Pupils without Reply* — But here our Author confounds two Things very distinct, the Proofs of our Saviour's Mission, and those of his Doctrine. *Christ* had no Occasion to offer to their Examination every particular Doctrine, which he taught; but only this general Truth, that he

^s See Matt. xi. 20, &c. xii. 28. ^h John ii. 11.
vii. 31. xi. 42. xiv. 10, 11. xv. 24. ⁱ See p. 105.
^k P. 37. ^l Matt. vii. 29.

was a Person sent from God. *He taught them indeed, as one having Authority; but he first gave Proof of that Authority. He demonstrated by many infallible Proofs, that he was sent from Heaven; and then, surely he might well challenge a Right to dictate and prescribe to his Pupils.*

^m In the next Place we are told, that these *Disciples knew nothing of Reasoning; it was a Matter quite out of their Element.*—ⁿ But it has been already shewn, that *Reasoning* is not so much *out of the Element* of the Vulgar, as this Gentleman would persuade us; and that the Proofs of Christianity are plain and obvious to any Man of common Capacity. Our Saviour made no Use of *Sophistry*, to perplex and entangle Men; the Proofs of his Mission, though rational and conclusive, might yet easily be understood without any profound Skill in the Arts of *Syllogism*. The Apostles had Eyes to see, and Ears to hear; they were, I believe, qualified to serve on a Jury and capable of Judging of plain Matters of Fact.

° But we are told, that our Saviour *did but ill approve the being called on upon any Occasion to explain; and that this will readily appear, when we observe, how cautious and reserv'd those who were best acquainted with his Manner were in that Particular; how*

*fearful at every Turn of giving Offence, and incurring Reproof by any farther Enquiry, even at Times, when they did not really apprehend his Meaning. — This is another of our Author's ^p Inadvertencies, for which he expects a formal Indemnity. If we look into Scripture, we shall find just the Reverse of all this to be true. ^q Our Saviour himself tells his Disciples, that he had made known unto them all Things that he had heard of his Father. ^r St. Mark tells us, that though he sometimes spake to the People in Parables, yet, when they were alone, he expounded all Things to his Disciples. ^s We find them accordingly at every Turn freely asking him Questions, and him as freely answering them. What then has our Author to alledge against all this Testimony? But one only Instance, I think, where, on our Saviour's preaching to them disagreeable Doctrine, we are told ^t they understood it not, and were afraid to ask him, though whence their Fear arose is no where intimated. Perhaps, like dull Scholars, they were afraid to ask Questions, lest they should be chid for their Ignorance; perhaps they disliked the Doctrine, and (as is too often the Case) were unwilling to be too well assur'd of it. — *Veriti & increpationem, & ex clariore explicatione mœroris augmentum,**

^p See p. 105.^q John xv. 15.^r Mark iv. 34.^s See Matt. xiii. 10. xv. 15. xviii. 21. Mark x. 10.Luke viii. 9. xi. 1. John xiv. 5. ^t Mark ix. 32.

— says one of the ^u Commentators. But, whatever Cause may be assign'd, I think we cannot but admire our Author's Skill, who could so well improve upon so slender a Hint, and so ingeniously extract something out of — nothing.

^x In another Place our Author would persuade us, that *Christ had no Intention to prove his own Truth and Character by his Miracles*; and that he was *always remarkably upon the Reserve in that Respect, whenever he happen'd amongst unbelieving Company, and took particular Care to prevent their ever coming to publick Notice.* — But this again is all false Fact. Did this Gentleman never read the Bible? or, did he hope to meet with Readers, who never had? It is evident to any one, who will look into the Gospel-History, that many of our Lord's Miracles were wrought in the most publick Manner: ^y Some at *Jerusalem*, at the Time of a publick *Feast*; ^z others, *in the Streets of Villages and Cities*; ^a others, *in their Publick Synagogues*; ^b others, *before great Multitudes, who came together to hear, and to be heal'd by him of their Infirmities.* ^c He healed the *Paralytick* before a vast *Multitude* of People, when *there were Pharisees and Doctors of the Law sitting by,*

^u *Lucas Brugenfis.*

^x P. 48.

^y John ii. 23.

iv. 45.

^z Mark vi. 56.

^a Matt. ix. 35.

xii. 10.

^b Luke v. 15.

Mark i. 32.

^c Luke

v. 17, &c.

which were come out of every Town of Galilee, and Judea, and Jerusalem. ^v Just before his Death *the Blind and the Lame came to him in the Temple, and he healed them; and the Chief Priests and Scribes saw the wonderful things that he did.* And, that our Saviour designed *these Instances of his Power as Proofs of his Truth and Character,* and appealed to them as such, has been already, I hope, shewn sufficiently.

But are there not several Instances upon Record, where our Saviour refused to give Proofs of his Mission, when called upon so to do; and took particular Care to prevent *their ever coming to publick Notice?* — Be it so, and what would any plain Man naturally conclude from thence, but that as our Saviour, on all proper Occasions, fully proved his Mission by many Signs and Miracles; so he sometimes had particular Reasons for refusing, or concealing them? Thus common Sense and Equity would oblige us to judge, though we could not always assign the Reason of his so doing. But let us examine the Instances our Author has produced; and we shall find, that the Scripture itself will furnish us with Reasons sufficient to justify our Saviour's Conduct in every one of them.

^w The first Instance he alledges, is that of *the Scribes and Pharisees asking a Sign of*

^v Matth. xxi. 14, 15. ^w Pag. 37, 38. Matth. xii. 38, 39.

our Saviour. But he answered, and said to them: *An evil and adulterous Generation seeketh after a Sign; and there shall no Sign be given it, but the Sign of the Prophet Jonas.* — This seeking after a Sign, our Author calls *desiring a rational Evidence for their Discipleship*; and tells us, that it was so far from any thing criminal or blame-worthy, that it was, in all Reason, their indispensable Duty. — Our Author's Inadvertencies multiply upon us apace. He tells us, that these Scribes and Pharisees are styled a foolish and adulterous Generation, for their Presumption in seeking after a Sign. But our Saviour says no such thing; he styles them, in general, *an evil and adulterous Generation*, without any Reference to this particular Instance of seeking after a Sign: From whence one might reasonably conclude, that our Saviour therefore refused them a Sign, because they were antecedently *evil and adulterous*, and were like to be never the better for it. Again, the latter Clause — *but the Sign of the Prophet Jonas* — our Author has wholly omitted. It was not to his purpose; it would have shewn, that *Christ* did not expect his Religion should be received without Proof; that, though for the present he refused them a Sign, yet he referred, even this *evil and adulterous Generation*, to a great and remarkable Miracle to be wrought hereafter.

^b *But Punctuality is, by no Means, this Writer's Care: If he had given us a fair Representation of the whole Truth, it would not have answered his Design; his Objection would not have carried the Face of something plausible. This we must do then for him: We need indeed only look back into the Occasion of what passed here between our Saviour and the Scribes and Pharisees, and we shall find a full Justification of his Conduct. We read, ^c that they brought unto him one possessed with a Devil, blind and dumb; and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw. And all the People were amazed, and said, Is not this the Son of David? But the Pharisees, though they could not deny the Truth of this notable Miracle, yet chose rather to take Refuge in any Pretence, than submit to the Evidence of it. This Fellow (said they) doth not cast out Devils, but by Beelzebub, the Prince of the Devils. To this Objection our Saviour gives a full and solid Answer. But the Scribes and Pharisees, though they could not reply to his Reasons, nor deny a Fact plainly wrought before their Eyes, stand out still against Conviction, and call for a new and greater Sign to satisfy them.*

Then certain of the Scribes and Pharisees

^b See pag. 105.

^c Matth. xii, 22, &c.

answered,

answered, saying, Master, we would see a Sign from thee. But all this our Author pronounces to be ^d far from any thing criminal or blame-worthy. These worthy Pharisees only desired a rational Evidence for their Discipleship; it was their indispensable Duty never to be satisfied, or convinced, but to require one Sign after another, without Reason, and without End. But our Saviour, it seems, was of another Opinion: He thought, that, as they deserved no farther Application, so any new Means of Conviction would have been as ineffectual as the former.

^e But there is another Instance of the like Nature in Scripture, where the Pharisees, again, on another Occasion, came to our Saviour, and, tempting him, desired that he would shew them a Sign from Heaven. This was, again, after many and great Miracles wrought by him; and therefore no Wonder, that he should give them the like Refusal. But our Saviour's Answer to them, on this Occasion, is very remarkable: — *He answered, and said unto them, When it is Evening ye say, It will be fair Weather; for the Sky is red. And, in the Morning, It will be foul Weather To-day; for the Sky is red and lowring. O ye Hypocrites, ye can discern the Face of the Sky; but can ye not discern the*

^d Page 38.

^e Matth. xvi. 4.

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Signs of the Times? A wicked and adulterous Generation seeketh after a Sign; and there shall no Sign be given unto it but the Sign of the Prophet Jonas. — We see here, that our Saviour was far from expecting to be received without Proof or *Examination*. He *appeals to their Understanding*; refers them to *the Signs of the Times*, the Proofs of his Mission already given, Proofs as obvious to every Understanding as the usual Prognostications of the Weather, which all the World had observed, and formed into common Proverbs. Lastly, he promises them a great and decisive Miracle to be performed hereafter. His whole Answer may not improperly be thus paraphrased. — Why ask you of me a new Sign? I have already given you sufficient Proofs of my Mission, such Proofs as are as plain and obvious as the common Observations you all make on the Weather. I know your Wickedness and Hypocrisy, and think myself by no means obliged to gratify every Demand of this kind, which perverse and unreasonable Men shall make. But, however, you shall not be left without Evidence. My Resurrection from the Dead, typified in the Prophet *Jonas*, will be such a Demonstration of my being the *Messiah*, as must convince all, who are capable of Conviction. — And now, I hope, it appears, that these Instances are so far from shewing, that *Christ* declined a fair Trial of his Pretensions,

sions, that they carry with them a full Proof of the contrary.

^f Another worthy Person our Saviour stands accused of denying to produce the Testimonials of his Mission before, is *Herod*. ^g We read that *Herod hoped to have seen some Miracle done by him; but though he questioned with him in many Words, he answered him nothing*. This wanting to see a Miracle, our Author tells us, was a promising Symptom and Mark of a towardsly Disposition for future Discipleship; and ought to have been countenanced and cultivated, if Christ's Miracles had been at all calculated for the Purpose of converting. — But is the wanting to see a Miracle, barely of itself such a promising Symptom? The last Instance of the *Pharisees* plainly shews the contrary. A light Curiosity or meer Perverseness and Obstinacy, may put Men upon asking a Sign. It appears indeed from the Account, which the Scriptures have left of this *Herod*, that he was not of so towardsly a Disposition as this Gentleman would represent him. ^h He had heard of the Fame of Jesus, and received sufficient Testimony of the mighty Works done by him; this served indeed to alarm his guilty Conscience, but produced no Conversion or Reformation of his Life. He lived at this very

^f Pag. 49. ^g Luke xxiii. 8, 9. ^h Matth. xiv. 12, &c.
Time

Time in Incest and Adultery; and he had not long since put *John the Baptist* to Death for telling him the Truth. Well then might *Jesus* despair of making any Impression on such a Man; well might he refuse to work a Miracle, where, in all human Appearance, it would be wrought in vain. ⁱ But our Author is of Opinion, *that the seeming desirous to canvas the Evidence, though from no other Principle originally than that of gratifying a light Curiosity, were a Turn of Mind to be favourably entertained.* — Our Saviour perhaps had not so favourable an Opinion of such a Turn of Mind. His Miracles were not designed to gratify a light Curiosity. Nay, the chief End of his coming into the World, was not barely to gain Credit to his Mission, but to reform Mens Lives. He delighted not (as Impostors usually do) in a Number of Disciples, unless they were such as were disposed to practise, as well as believe his Doctrines; he was not solicitous to gain Profelytes, unless they were, at the same time, likely to become Profelytes to Virtue and Holiness. But however promising a Symptom this Desire of seeing a Miracle might be in itself, we, Christians, must be allowed to plead, that our Saviour knew what was in Man. ^k He well understood what *Leaven Herod* was of;

ⁱ Pag. 49.^k John ii. 25.

he knew, better than our Author, whether he was *disposed for future Discipleship*; and might well be excused working a Miracle, where he foresaw it would be ineffectual. ¹ Another Instance produced, to shew that our Saviour was very *sparing* in his Miracles, is his Behaviour at *Nazareth*, where, we are told, ^m *he did not many mighty Works, because of their Unbelief*. — But this Unbelief our Author thinks, ⁿ *would have been the very Reason of his multiplying his Miracles, or some better Means for their Reduction, if he had thought them Subjects the least deserving of his farther Care or Assistance*. This might possibly have alarmed their stubborn Minds into a better State, and prompted a Desire of farther Instruction. — But to this it is easy to answer, that *possibly* it might have had no such Effect; and that our Saviour best knew, whether it would or no. In vain then does this Gentleman accuse him of *capriciously neglecting the Errand he came on*; he might only act the Part of a wise Physician, who forbears to apply his Remedies, because he finds his Patient in no proper Disposition to receive Benefit by them. Had *Christ* indeed wrought few, or none of his Miracles, before any but his own Disciples, this might have left some Suspicion of Imposture; but the contrary has been already fully proved.

¹ Page 67.

^m Matth. xiii. 58.

ⁿ P. 67.

But will our Author say, that an obstinate Continuance in *Unbelief*, amidst all the Means of Conviction, is a *Reason for multiplying* these Means without End? The excellent *Grotius* shall answer him: — ° *Fecit passim Christus miracula, ut hi quibus de ipso nihil constabat in ipsum crederent. Credere incipientibus alia addidit, quibus in fide jam inchoata confirmarentur, prima spernentibus plura non ingessit, ne vilesceret divina Liberalitas. Ita solet Deus alternis beneficia præstare & officia exigere.* — P But if the Reader should not have *Leisure to consult*, or *Sagacity to apprehend the acute Lessons of a Hammond or Grotius*, I will send him to one, who is not quite so *acute*. He need only turn over the Leaf, and he will find our Author, in the very next Page, answering himself. ¶ He there owns our Saviour to be *strictly justifiable*, in withdrawing his *Light from such as chuse to sit in Darkness*, and *absolutely refusing the Continuance of all Means of Conviction to such as, by their Ingratitude and Neglect, had rendered themselves unworthy of all farther Sollicitation; and would, by their Infidelity of Spirit, render its Operations, if tried, of no Effect*. Let us then consider the Case of these *Nazarenes*. Our Author pleads warmly in their Behalf. ¶ He tells us, that *we might not unreasonably*

° *Grotius* Comment. on Matth. xiii. 58.

P See p. 112.

¶ P. 68.

P. 67.

have expected to see something more of the long-suffering Character displayed in their Behalf; that some more patient Degree of Attendance had, in all Probability, been indulged to a tardy Genius and innocent Scruples, if they had been the only Impediment; that it might seem somewhat hard and severe to reprobate, by so short a Process for Hesitation, those whom perhaps one additional Circumstance of Power shining upon them had brought to a proper Temper and Obedience. — But pray what Authority has this Writer to call this Process so short? Can he tell us how long Christ staid at Nazareth? The Scripture has no where informed us. But the best Commentators agree, that this happened in the second Year of his Ministry, that he had now taught and worked Miracles for near two Years, most Part of which Time he had spent in the Parts adjacent. ^c He had been the Year before at this very Place; but, instead of receiving his Doctrine, or being convinced by his Miracles (^c the Fame of which was already spread through all the Region round about) they thrust him out of their City, and attempted to murder him. ^d After this he went about all Galilee, teaching in their Synagogue, and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, and healing all manner of Sickness, and all manner of Disease

^a Luke iv. 16.

^b Ib. ver. 14.

^c Matth. iv. 23.

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among the People. ^v *And the Fame of him went out into every Place of the Country round about.* These Nazarenes then must have heard of his Miracles; they, all of them, either had, or might have seen many of them. And now, after above a Year's Absence, our Saviour returns to them again. ^w He teaches there, and works Miracles, and would have wrought more, had not he found all his Attempts likely to prove fruitless and ineffectual. But though, by Reason of their Perverseness, he did not think fit to do *many mighty Works there*; yet he did some, ^x *enough to astonish*, though not to convince them. He had given them such Proofs of his Mission, that he could not forbear ^y *marvelling at their Unbelief.* This *Process* then was not so short as our Author seems to imagine; nor was a *tardy Genius and innocent Scruples the only Impediment* to their Conviction. They had had sufficient Time and Opportunity to be satisfied of the Truth of his Miracles; it was not the want of Evidence, ^z but the unreasonable Prejudices they had conceived at the Meanness of his Birth and Education, which hindered their Conversion. Nor did our Saviour *desist from all Occasions to promote their Salvation*, 'till he had fully experienced their

^v Luke iv. 37.^w Mark vi. 5.^x Matth. xiii. 54.^y Mark vi. 6.^z Matth. xiii. 54.

Luke iv. 22.

Unworthiness. After their contemptuous Refusal of the Offers of Salvation, and wicked Attempt upon his Life, he did not (as he justly might) *give them up instantly to the Hardness of their Hearts without Remedy.* No, he waited for their Conversion with all *Patience and Long-suffering.* He gave them Time to cool, and consider the Evidence of his Miracles, which, from all Parts, sounded in their Ears; and then returned again to seek the Happiness and Salvation of those, who had so unworthily treated him. But when he found the same inveterate Prejudices still predominant amongst them, he thought it to no purpose to labour their Reformation any farther. After this second Repulse he might justly take his final Leave of them, for the same Reason as *Aristotle* is said to have left *Athens*. — ἵνα μὴ πρόφασιν δῶμεν Ἀθηναίοις τοῦ δεύτερον ἄγῳ ἀναλαβεῖν ὧδ' ἀπλήσιον τῷ κατὰ Σωκράτους, καὶ ἵνα μὴ δεύτερον εἰς φιλοσοφίαν ἀσεβήσωσιν. — “left we should
“ give the *Athenians* Occasion to commit an-
“ other Sin (as they did before in the Case of
“ *Socrates*) and lest they should offer a second
“ Outrage to Philosophy.” Again, how does it appear that this People were reprobated, even after all this contemptuous Treatment of our Saviour? He still continued to preach and work Miracles, though not in this very

ῥ Origen. contra Celsum p. 51.

Place. ^b He soon after sent his *twelve Apostles*, ^c and, after this, *seventy others to the lost Sheep of the House of Israel*. Then again after his Ascension, did not the Apostles go forth, and preach every where? Did they make any Exceptions, or refuse any Converts, who came in to them? ^d Did not they offer Salvation to *all the House of Israel*, ^e even to those who had crucified their Lord and Saviour? Were not these very Nazarenes called amongst the rest, and invited by many additional Circumstances of Power to embrace that Gospel they had before so contemptuously rejected?

^f Another Charge against our Saviour is, that he *often* purposely concealed his Miracles, which he would not have done, if he had any such Meaning, as to convince by these Works: that he took particular Care to prevent their ever coming to publick Notice, by dismissing most of the Company and Attendants, before he began to proceed to the Operation; that he would not suffer his grateful Patients to proclaim the Benefits they had received, but enjoined them the strictest Silence. — See thou tell no Man, was generally the Charge, — Our Author speaks in very general Terms: But there is but one Instance, as I know of, of our Saviour's dismissing the

^b Matth. x. 6.^c Luke x. 1.^d Acts ii. 36.^e Ib. iii. 12.^f P. 48.

Company before he wrought his Miracles, and that was in the Case of *Jairus's* Daughter. ^g And then he took with him both sufficient and proper Witnesses: Five Persons were admitted, three of his Disciples, who were to be employed to bear Witness of his Character and Works, and the Father and Mother of the Damself, who were most concerned, and best qualified to prevent or detect a Forgery. It concerns us not to enquire why the rest of *the Company* were dismissed; perhaps to prevent Confusion or Disturbance, perhaps because the Room would not conveniently hold them, or for some other Reasons unknown to us.

There are indeed some few Instances, where our Saviour forbade the Persons he healed to publish it, among numberless Examples of Cures and Miracles performed in publick; and of these few I hope I shall be able to assign Reasons abundantly sufficient to justify our Saviour's Conduct.

^h The first Instances of this kind recorded in Scripture are, where *Christ* would not suffer the Devils to say, that they knew him, but commanded them to hold their Peace. — Our Saviour, I suppose, thought he had no Occasion of such Testimony. These Miracles were not done in a Corner, but before great Multitudes; ⁱ one in the publick Syna-

^g Luke viii. 51. ^h Mark v. 25, 34. Luke iv. 35, 41.
ⁱ Mark i. 23.

gogue, ^k others before *the whole City of Capernaum*, who were *gathered together at the Door*. He did not therefore endeavour to hide them from publick Notice ; but he thought that to silence these evil Spirits, and cast them out, was a stronger Evidence of his Divine Power, than any Testimony he could receive from their Mouths. Had they been suffer'd *to proclaim their Knowledge of his Divine Character to the World*, he might have been suspected (^l as he afterwards was) of acting in Confederacy with these unclean Spirits ; but this *commanding them with such Authority* as it cut off all Ground for such Suspicion, so was it a full Proof of his superior Power over them.

^m The next Instance we read of, is that of the *Leper* whom our Saviour heal'd. And after he was cleans'd, he said to him — *See thou tell no Man, but go thy Way, shew thyself to the Priest, and offer the Gift that Moses commanded for a Testimony unto them.*—— Now it does not appear, that our Saviour design'd this as an absolute Prohibition; he seems, rather to have only forbid him to *tell any Man*, till he had *first shew'd himself to the Priest* ; and then after this, to have left him at Liberty. He would have *the Priest* first pronounce him clean, that there might be no

^k Mark i. 33. ^l Matt. xii. 24. ^m Matt. viii. 21.
Mark i. 40. Luke v. 12.

Reason or Pretence for questioning the Reality of the Cure. Our Saviour therefore seems to have had no Intention to conceal this Miracle; he only chose to publish it in the most prudent and effectual Manner: He design'd it *for a Testimony unto the Jews*, but he took Care to make that *Testimony* as clear and unexceptionable as possible.

These are the only Instances, where our Saviour may seem to have forbid the publishing his Miracles, during the First Year of his Ministry; and these, it appears, are no Instances at all. Our Lord, for the Space of a whole Year, *went about doing good, and healing all that were oppress'd of the Devil*, in the most publick Manner that could be. ^b He seems to have taken all Opportunities of manifesting forth his Divine Power. But after this, he found himself obliged to act with more Caution. Though he gave frequent Proofs of his Mission, and neglected no proper Occasion of doing good, yet he chose to do it in a more private Manner. The Reason of his acting thus cautiously, was plainly this. His Doctrine did not meet with that Success, which might have been expected. He had a great deal to fear, both from Friends and Enemies. His Opposers were only the more enraged and incens'd, at every new Act of

^b Matt. iv. 23, 24. Matt. viii. 16. Mark i. 23.
 Luke iv. 40. John iv. 45.

Power; while those who gave Credit to his Miracles, many of them, dreamt only of a Temporal Deliverer, and ^c could scarce be restrain'd from *taking him by Force, to make him a King*. These therefore he would not encourage, ^d *nor commit himself to them*; while with those, he thought it more prudent to decline the Contest. To multiply Miracles before them would be ineffectual, and might be dangerous. It might raise a Tumult, and expose his Life unnecessarily, and before his appointed Time. ^e The Publication of his Miracles frequently rais'd such a Concourse of People, as oblig'd him to retire, to prevent any Disturbances, and to remove all just Occasion of Jealousy in the Government. What Method then should he take in these Circumstances? When any Man came to him to be heal'd, he would not turn them back, but he enjoyn'd them Secresy: And thus display'd at once his peaceable Disposition, his Prudence, and his Goodness. Nor is this bare Conjecture; it is the Account, which the Scriptures themselves give us of this Matter. ^f Our Saviour, in the Second Year of his Ministry, had been working Cures publicly at *Jerusalem*. But *the Pharisees*, instead of being convinc'd, *were fill'd with Madness, and took Counsel with the Herodians*

^c John vi. 15. ^d John ii. 24. ^e Mark i. 45. John vi. 15. ^f Matt. xii. 9. Mark iii. 1. Luke vi. 6.

how they might destroy him. ^g Then *our Saviour* found it necessary to *withdraw with his Disciples*: Then first we read, that *he healed many*, and *straitly* charg'd them that they should not make him known. And the Reason of this his Procedure is given us in the following Verses. ^h *He would not strive, nor cry*, nor give any Occasion for Tumult or Disturbance, which the publick Exercise of his Power must in the present Circumstances have necessarily produc'd. ⁱ This too was probably one Reason why he chose to heal *Jairus's Daughter* in a more private Manner than usual, and forbad her Relations to make it known. On the same Account he might forbid ^k *the two blind Men*, and ^l *the deaf and dumb Man* to publish the Miracles wrought on them. ^m Though all this while we find him frequently performing Miracles before great Multitudes, when, I suppose, he might safely do it without Fear of Tumult or Danger.

ⁿ We read, *Mark viii. 22, &c.* that he healed *a blind Man at Bethsaida*; but that *he led him first out of the Town*, and afterwards forbad him to *go into the Town, or tell it to any in the Town*. This might probably be for the same Reasons, that he forbore to multiply

^g Matt. xii. 15, 16. Mark iii. 12. ^h Matt. xii. 19.
ⁱ Mark v. 37, 43. ^k Matt. ix. 30.
^l Mark vii. 36. ^m Luke vi. 17. Luke vii. 11.
Matt. xv. 30. Matt. xix. 2. ⁿ Mark viii. 22.

his Miracles at *Nazareth*. ° *Bethsaida* had before despised his *mighty Works*, and stood out against Miracles sufficient to have converted the most idolatrous Nations; and therefore he might well despair of making any Impression on them.

I have now gone through all the Passages I can meet with where our Saviour may seem to have affected Privacy in his Miracles, excepting only two; ° one where he *charges his Disciples to tell no Man, that he was the Christ*; ° another, when after his *Transfiguration* he commanded them *to tell the Vision to no Man, until the Son of Man was risen again from the Dead*. His Conduct on both these Occasions may, I believe, be easily accounted for from what has been already said. He could not trust his own Disciples. They, as well as the rest of the *Jews*, look'd for a temporal Deliverer; they might perhaps, if not restrain'd by such a Prohibition, have been the first to have headed a Commotion; at least such a Declaration at this unseasonable Conjunction, when the *Pharisees* were violently exasperated against him, and the Populace ready on the least Encouragement to rise in his Favour, might have been of dangerous Consequence. In the latter Case indeed he commands not his Disciples to

° Matt. xi. 21.
xvii. 9.

° Matt. xvi. 20.

° Matt.

conceal the Miracle, but only to defer the Publication of it till a proper Opportunity. What was here said and done was in the Presence only of his Disciples, and was to receive Credit from their Testimony. He therefore forbids them to publish it, till after his Resurrection, when there could be no Suspicion of his setting up for a temporal King, and when their Testimony was more likely to be receiv'd. And accordingly we find that they then ^r *made known* to all Mankind *the Glory and Majesty they were Eye-Witnesses of,* ^s and boldly testified in the most publick Manner, that *this* Jesus was Lord and Christ. And now from a full View of our Saviour's whole Conduct we leave the Reader to judge with what Truth our Author can say, that he *was always remarkably upon the Reserve*; or, that he *often or generally took particular Care to prevent* his Miracles ever coming to publick Notice.

^t But, there remains still an Accusation of the like Nature against our Saviour, for *not exposing his Person to publick View after his Resurrection, when, as our Author ingeniously expresses it, his taking one Turn in the Market-Place, might have spared both the painful Labours and Lives of so many holy Vouchers.* — But, will this Gentleman answer for these *incredulous and stiff-neck'd Jews*? Is he

^r 2 Pet. i. 16.

^s Acts ii. 36.

^t P. 68.

sure that our Saviour, by *his taking one*, or several *Turns in the Market-Place*, would have convinc'd them? Might they not still have pretended, it was a Phantom or Delusion? Supposing them by this Means convinc'd of the Fact, is he sure they would all immediately have become *Christ's Disciples*? Our Saviour had just before rais'd *Lazarus* from the Dead; and the *Chief Priest* could not deny the Fact. But what was the Consequence? *Why, they consulted to put him to Death* anew.

Again, supposing all the *Jews* to have been converted by so notable a Miracle, and become Christians, what then? I hope our Author does not think, that *Faith* alone would have *sav'd* them. These *Jews*, so converted, might have still continued in their Sins after their Conversion, unless God had been at the Expence of a new Miracle, to have reform'd their Hearts, as well as to convince their Understandings. ** But, I say, did not Israel know? Had this disobedient and gainsaying People any Reason to complain of Want of sufficient Evidence? The Thing was not* (as our Author vainly suggests) *done in a Corner.* *Christ* suffer'd openly in their Sight; *†* and they were so well appriz'd of his Prediction that he should *rise again*, that they *set a Guard on his Sepulchre*; and from their

† John xii. 10. *** Rom. x. 19. *‡* Matt. xxvi. 62.

Guards they learnt the Truth. Every Soldier was to them a Witness of the Resurrection of their own chusing. After this the Apostles, and many others, bore Witness to the same publickly in their *Streets*, in their *Market-places*, in their *Synagogues*, and in their *Temple*. And this their Testimony they confirmed by many Miracles wrought *in the Name of Christ* openly before great Multitudes. The great Miracle, in particular, wrought *on the Day of Pentecost* (we presume) *was not done in a Corner*. *Christ* may be properly enough said, on this Day, to have appeared *in the Market-place*, though not in Body, yet in *Spirit and Power*. And yet this Gentleman will warrant us, that *these incredulous and stiff-necked Jews*, who stood out against so many and great Miracles, would, by one publick Appearance of our Saviour, have been at once all converted and become good Christians. Let us then suppose them, by this Means, convinced that he was the *Christ*. But would there not have been the same Danger of a publick Insurrection, as there was before his Death? We find the Thoughts of a temporal Deliverer were still uppermost in his Disciples Minds. ^z When they saw him thus triumphant over the Powers of the Grave, they presently put the Question: — *Wilt thou, at*

^z Acts i. 6.

this Time, restore again the Kingdom to Israel? And no doubt but the rest of the *Jews* would have been equally zealous for *restoring the Kingdom to Israel*. Had *Christ* appeared publickly among them, it would probably have occasioned a general Insurrection; they would scarce have waited to ask him the Question; but would have been ready to take him by Force, and make him a King. It was therefore wisely contrived thus to give full Proof of his Resurrection, without *exposing his Person*. The many stupendous Miracles, wrought by his Commission, and in his Name, were as strong Evidences of his Resurrection, as if he himself had appeared in Person; and, at the same time, this Method cut off all Pretence and Possibility of setting him up for a temporal King. Again, if we suppose the *Jews* all convinced by our Saviour's Appearance amongst them; yet how were other Nations to be converted? Must *Christ* appear in every Country and Age? If not, *holy Vouchers* must still hazard their *Lives*, and employ their *painful Labours*. Let us then suppose these *holy Vouchers* setting out with Authority from the Chief Priests and Elders, and producing proper Attestations of our Saviour's Resurrection certified under their Hands and Seals. Would this have carried with it greater Evidence? I apprehend just the contrary. The *Romans* would probably have

have suspected it to be a national Contrivance, a Conspiracy to shake off their Yoke; and, instead of giving Credit to this Testimony, would have been rather provoked to destroy *their Place and Nation*. Then, with regard to future Ages, should we, of these Times, have had fuller Proof of the Resurrection on this Supposition? Would not these very Gentlemen, who object against the Testimony of the Apostles, have made greater and stronger Objections to such a National Testimony? They would have told us, and that with great Shew of Reason, that it was a Trick of State, plainly calculated to serve a politick End, and assert their Claim to Liberty and Dominion; that such an Imposture might be easily carried on under the Shelter of the *Jewish* Magistracy; that the People would be led, both by Inclination and Interest, to give into the Fraud, while those, who were more wise and impartial, wanted Courage to attempt, and Opportunity and Means to carry on a fair Enquiry. These would have been Objections much more difficult to answer, than any that can be brought against the Evidence we have at present of our Lord's Resurrection. Here then we have a plain Reason why he did not appear publickly to the *Jews* after he was risen. He chose rather to have this great Point attested in such a manner, as might be most satisfactory to all Ages and Nations, than to satisfy the

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*incredulous and stiff-necked Jews, who had,
^a by their Ingratitude and Neglect, rendered
 themselves unworthy of all farther Sollicita-
 tion. And yet these had the Testimony of
^b above five hundred credible Witnesses, ^c the
 Lord also working with them, and confirming
 their Word with Signs following.*

Another Argument our Author makes use
 of is, that our Saviour would not work his
 Miracles ^d without stipulating constantly be-
 fore-hand for previous Confidence and Per-
 suasion: — ^e the Conviction was to precede
 the Evidence, — Believe you that I am able
 to do this? — is the Language of the Gospel.
 Again, — ^f Wherever we find these Favours
 conferred, it was still perceiving that the Pa-
 tient had Faith to be healed. — Constantly,
 and — wherever does the Man say? When
 he cast out Devils, whom did he stipulate
 with, and where did he perceive Faith?
 When he raised the Dead, did he perceive
 Faith in those dead Persons he raised, or did
 he stipulate with them before-hand, before he
 would raise them to Life again? When he
 healed Malchus's Ear, did he perceive Faith
 in him, or did he stipulate before-hand ei-
 ther with him, or with Judas, and the Sol-
 diers? This — constantly — will dwindle at
 last into three or four Instances among num-

^a See p. 68.

^b 1 Cor. xv. 6.

^c Mark xvi. 20

^d P. 49.

^e P. 37.

^f P. 50.

berless others, where no such *Stipulation* was, or could be made. And not one of these Instances happened till after our Saviour had already given full Proof of his Mission by many notorious Miracles. Besides, I would ask, what it was these Persons came to our Saviour for? — not for Instruction, but for a Cure. They had before seen and heard of his *wonderful Works*; and they came to him, not to be satisfied of the Truth of his Mission, but to be healed of their Infirmities. If therefore our Saviour required *Faith* in such Persons, what can we conclude from thence, but only that he did not think those, who questioned his Power of working Miracles, worthy to receive the Benefit of it? As our Saviour had before given full Evidence of his Power, he might reasonably require *Faith* in those, who came to ask Favours of him; and he might, without any Impropriety, say to Persons, who came to him for a Cure, in full Persuasion of his Power to heal them: — *Thy Faith hath made thee whole.* — Such Miracles might, at the same time, be a *Sign to them* that *believed not*, and a Reward of *Faith* to those who believed.

^d But does not our Saviour severely reprove the *Nobleman of Capernaum*, for not believing in him without rational Evidence? —

^d *Except you see Signs and Wonders* (says he) *you will not believe.* — The Scripture will, I believe, justify itself. Our Saviour had, the Year before, wrought a great Miracle in this very Country; and, since that, had performed ^e many at *Jerusalem*, enough to convince the *Galileans*, and dispose them to *receive him*. He might therefore now reasonably require *Faith* of those who came to him, and reprove them for the want of it. He does not blame this Nobleman for not believing without sufficient Evidence, but for requiring more than was sufficient. ^f The Case indeed seems to be this: This noble Person had heard of the Cures performed by our Saviour; and was in Hopes *his Son*, now at the Point of Death, might receive Benefit from him; but he did not yet believe, or acknowledge him to be the *Messiah*. He seems to have imagined, that if *Christ* would go down to his House, he might, by his Touch, or some corporal Application, possibly heal his Son; but he never thought (^g as the *Centurion* did) that he could *heal him only by speaking a Word*. Our Saviour therefore treats him with some Coldness and Reserve, that he might at once make the Miracle appear greater, and the Benefit and Effect of it upon the Asker more successful too.

^d John iv. 48. ^e Ib. 40. See also John ii. 23 iii. 2.

^f See *Stanhope* on Epist. and Gosp. Vol. III. p. 575.

^g Matth. viii. 8.

He first gives him a gentle Reproof for his Incredulity; but then he complies with his Request, and heals his Son in a more extraordinary manner than he either desired or expected. The Consequence of this was, that he *himself believed, and his whole House*. Our Saviour then, we see, did lay *the Arguments and Proofs of his Mission before this Man*. This Miracle was plainly wrought with *a View towards reclaiming his Mind to a proper Sense and Reverence for the Actor*, and wrought designedly in such a manner as might be most effectual for that purpose. And it had the Effect proposed; this Person was persuaded by so powerful an *Argument*, and believed on *rational Evidence*.

I have now, I hope, fully vindicated our Blessed Saviour's Character from all our Author's Exceptions. It required indeed no great ^h *Sagacity to discover his Mistakes and Misapplications of Scripture*. All that was necessary to justify our Saviour, was to direct the Reader to those Scriptures, where his Actions are recorded. The same Method will sufficiently vindicate the Conduct of his Apostles. ⁱ *They too, we are told, tread punctually in their Master's Steps; they laid not the Arguments and Proofs of their Mission before their Disciples; but insisted constantly on the ready Acknowledgment of their*

^h See p. 105.

ⁱ P. 38.

Doctrines, without any Concession of Time for Doubt or Deliberation. — But if we look into Scripture we shall find just the Reverse of all this to be true. There we are told, that they performed many Miracles publickly ^k in the Streets of Jerusalem, ^l in the Temple, ^m in Cities and Places of publick Concourse; ⁿ and to these Miracles they frequently appealed for Proof of their Mission. ^o They assure us, that God bore them Witness with Signs, and Wonders, and with divers Miracles, and Gifts of the Holy Ghost. ^p St. Paul tells the Corinthians, that the Signs of an Apostle were wrought by him amongst them in Signs, and Wonders, and mighty Deeds. We find them, in all their Discourses with the Jews, reasoning with them, proving that Jesus was the Christ, ^q both from Scripture, ^r and from the Miracles wrought by him. ^s We read that St. Paul, as his Manner was, went into the Synagogue, and, three Sabbath Days, reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, opening, and alledging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the Dead; and that this Jesus, whom he preached unto them, was Christ. ^t Again at Corinth, where he continued a Year and six Months, he reasoned

^k Acts v. 15, 16.^l Ib. iii. 1.^m Ib. viii. 6, 7.Ib. xiv. 8. ⁿ Ib. ii. 33. iii. 12. iv. 10. ^o Heb. ii. 4.^p 2 Cor. xii. 12.^q Acts xiv. 16. iii. 21. ^r Ib. ii. 22.^s Ib. xvii. 3.^t Ib. xviii. 4, 11.

in the Synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. ^u And so also at Ephesus, he went into the Synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three Months, disputing, and persuading the Things concerning the Kingdom of God. ^x At Athens we find him disputing both with the Jews and Greeks, and setting forth the Folly of Idolatry with the utmost Strength of Reason. So far were they from allowing *no Time for Doubt or Deliberation*, ^y that the Bereans are commended for examining the Force of their Arguments, and *searching the Scriptures daily, whether those Things were so.* And even those, who were already their Disciples, they call upon to ^z *prove all Things, to judge in themselves.* — ^b *I speak as to wise Men* (says St. Paul) *judge ye what I say.*— And yet this Writer shall assert roundly, that they *never laid the Proofs of their Mission before their Disciples*; though every Miracle they wrought, and every Sermon they preached, carries with it a Confutation of him. Were Men to have been converted by a *secret Whisper*, or an *irresistible Light from Heaven*, that *flashed Conviction in a Moment*, there could have been no Occasion of any Miracles, or of any Teaching, or indeed of any Apostle; their Labours had been vain, and their Office useless.

^u Acts xix. 8.

^x Ib. xvii. 16.

^y Ib. xvii. 11.

^z 1 Thess. v. 21.

^a 1 Cor. xi. 13.

^b Ib. x. 15.

^a But our Author proceeds in the same Strain: — *Of the Terms of the Covenant one Declaration was often thought sufficient, not to accept them then was to reject them, and the least standing — off gave up the Unbeliever to Reprobation.* — This is just as true as what went before: I challenge our Author to produce one Instance of the Apostles proceeding in this summary Way. ^b He has indeed quoted one Text, where our Saviour commands his Apostles, ^c *to shake off the Dust under their Feet for a Testimony against those, who refused to receive them.* But were they not first to lay the Proofs of their Mission before them? Or were these Persons to be reprobated after one Declaration only? Those Cities to which the Apostles were sent, had, I presume, many of them, seen, all of them heard of our Saviour's Miracles. ^d The Apostles themselves were impowered to work great Miracles. ^e They made some considerable Stay wherever they found a favourable Reception; so that those, to whom they came, wanted neither Means of Conviction, nor Time for Deliberation. The Dust was shaken off against none but those, who either refused to hear them, or who stood out against Conviction. Against such Persons indeed a Doom was pronounced; but why? not for suspending their Assent, 'till

^a Page 38.^b P. 39.^c Mark vi. 11.^d Ib. ver. 14.^e Ib. ver. 10.

they had Time to examine the Proof of the Gospel, but for rejecting such Proof as was more than sufficient to have convinced the most wicked and idolatrous Nations; — ^f *Wo unto thee, Chorazin! Wo unto thee, Bethsaida! For if the mighty Works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in Sackcloth and Ashes.* — But, pray, how does it appear, that this Doom was final and irrevocable? Will this Gentleman assert, that the Apostles, after our Lord's Ascension, never preached in any of these Cities? or that they refused all Converts, who came from thence? ^g On the contrary, did not they preach the Gospel throughout *all Judea and Galilee*? ^h Did not they offer Salvation to *all the House of Israel*, even to them, who had denied the Holy One and the Just, and killed the Prince of Life? I cannot find, through all the *Acts of the Apostles*, but ⁱ one Instance of their *shaking off the Dust of their Feet* against any City; and that was not 'till they had contemptuously expelled them out of their Coasts; nor is there any Reason to suppose, that even these Persons were irrevocably sealed up under Reprobation. The Apostles were ^k *gentle unto all Men, apt to teach, patient; they, in Meekness, instructed those that*

^f Matth. xi. 21. ^g Acts i. 8. ix. 31. ^h Ib. ii. 36. iii. 14. ⁱ Ib. xiii. 51. ^k See 2 Tim. ii. 24, 25.

opposed themselves; and still hoped, that God peradventure might give them Repentance to the acknowledging of the Truth. ¹ *St. Paul's Conversion is a Pattern and Proof, that those, who had been before Blasphemers and Persecutors, might still find room for Repentance, and believe to Life everlasting. But, destitute of any direct Proof, our Author would argue against plain Matter of Fact, from Consequences, which he is pleased to draw from the Circumstances he supposes the Apostles to be in.* ^m *He tells us, they had neither Leisure nor Qualifications for such a Method — They could have no Time to spare, if they were so disposed. — Their Commission required them to keep stirring. — They could not afford to attend impertinent Queries, and lose their precious Moments in Controversies. — And therefore it was absolutely requisite, from their Circumstances, that their Hearers should come in at short Warning, to snatch the critical Opportunity, that they should be expeditious in their Motions, and comply without the least Hesitation. — But all this is again without the least Foundation from Scripture. Let me desire this Gentleman to read over the Acts of the Apostles; and there he will find they were not in so great Haste, as he would represent them. St. Paul, in particular, who seems*

¹ 1 Tim. i. 12.^m P. 38, 39.

to have had the most *extensive Province* of any of the Apostles; yet could find Time to stay in several Places. ⁿ *Two Years* he continued at Ephesus; so that all they, which dwelt in Asia, heard the Word of the Lord Jesus both Jews and Greeks; ^o *a Year and six Months* at Corinth; ^p *two whole Years* at Rome; ^q at all Places where he found Reason for staying, and the Rulers permitted it, he abode a sufficient Time. And, during this Time, he seems to have been willing to hear and answer all Objections, and give every body, that required it, all reasonable Satisfaction. ^r He spoke publicly in their Synagogues every Sabbath-day, and reasoned and disputed both with Jews and Greeks. ^s At Rome he received all who came in unto him, preaching the Kingdom of God, and teaching those Things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ. ^t Besides this he frequently, in his Circuits, returned again to the same Place; ^u where he could not conveniently go himself, he sent other Emissaries to plant the Gospel, and establish it where planted: ^w In every City where he came, he ordained Elders capable of building on the Foundation he had laid, and of instructing all who were desirous of it. Let

ⁿ Acts. xix. 10. ^o Ib. xviii. 11. ^p Ib. xxviii 30.

^q Ib. xiv. 3. ix. 23. xiv. 28. ^r Ib. xviii. 4.

^s Ib. xxviii. 30, 31. ^t Ib. xiv. 21. xv. 36. ^u Col. ii. 1.

^w Acts xiv. 23. 1 Tim. i. 3. Tit. i. 5.

the Reader then judge with what Truth this Writer can say, * *that their Office was only to circulate their Creeds; that they were not sent to dispute, but to preach.* — I have now, in many repeated Instances, convicted him, not of † *Inadvertencies* or *Errors in point of strict Criticism*, but of notorious Falshoods, what every one, who will look into his Bible, must know to be false. What must we then think of a Writer, who can assert so confidently, what is so easily disproved? What must we think of a Cause, that stands in need of such Methods to support it? I hope at least I may be allowed to pronounce our Saviour's, and his Apostles Conduct free from all just Exception; since it cannot be arraigned without being first most grossly misrepresented. *They sought false Witnesses against them, but found none; yea, though many false Witnesses came, yet found they none.*

But has our Author nothing to alledge against all this plain Proof? In Truth very little: ‡ He tells us, that *whole Congregations were often gained over at a Hearing, and thousands at a Time actually convinced by a single Lecture.* Queen Candace's Eunuch, the Proselyte of a short Stage, was instructed one Hour, and baptized the next; *sufficient Proofs that there was no standing*

* Page 39.

† See p. 105.

‡ P. 39.

to make *Exceptions in the Case*. — I must own, I am so dull as not to see the Force of this Proof. All that I can infer from hence is, that these Persons had no *Exceptions* to make. A plain undeniable Miracle, wrought before Mens Eyes, carries with it present Conviction; it is then no Wonder, that, by such Means, Numbers should be converted on the Spot. The Miracle, in particular, which was wrought on the *Day of Pentecost* (the only Instance, I think we read of, where *thousands* were convinced at once) was so astonishing in all its Circumstances, that there was so little Room to suspect any Fraud or Delusion, that, instead of wondering that so many were convinced by it, I think we rather ought to wonder, that *the whole Congregation* were not converted.

As to the Case of the *Eunuch*, the Scripture has given us but a very short Account either of his Character or his Conversion. Perhaps our Author can inform us better what passed between him and *Philip*, how long they were together, and whereabouts the Water stood where he was baptized. But I cannot but think, that if he were to be convinced ^a *by a secret Whisper*, and converted ^b *by an irresistible Light from Heaven*, there had been but little Occasion to send a

^a See p. 59.

^b P. 56.

Teacher to him. ^c It should seem, by the Scripture Account, that *Philip* did make use of Arguments: Some Discourse, 'tis plain, passed between them; and one Topick of Argument from a Prophecy of *Isaiah*, is particularly mentioned; and we may reasonably presume, that this *Eunuch* was at Liberty to *reply*, and make what *Exceptions* he thought proper. Perhaps indeed he did not think he had a *Right to multiply his Replies at Discretion*, and refuse to be *convinced*, when rational Conviction offered itself. ^d This *Eunuch* was a Profelyte, acquainted with Scripture; he could not be ignorant of the Expectation of a *Messias*, so general then among the *Jews*; and probably might have heard of the Fame and Character of *Jesus*. When therefore he was more fully informed of the Circumstances of his Life and Death; when he considered the Agreement of every Particular with the Predictions of the Prophets, and general Expectations of the *Jews*, the Miracles he wrought, and the Tendency of his Doctrine, he might be very soon convinced of the Truth of his Religion, without any Imputation of Folly or Credulity.

^e But, it seems, *these Instructors wanted as much the Skill and Address to manage a Controversy, as the Leisure to attend it.* —

^c Acts viii. 26,

^d Ib. ver. 27.

^e P. 40.

But

But I humbly presume it required no great *Skill*, or *Address* to manage this Controversy. What was to be proved? *That Jesus was the Son of God*; and how was this to be proved? By his Resurrection, and by the Miracles wrought by him, and his Apostles. These were plain Facts; and to such, I hope, *the most artless and illiterate Persons living* may bear Witness, as well as the most learned and eloquent. Nay, the more artless they were, the less Reason could there be to suspect any Fraud. Again, they proved the Truth of what they said by their own Miracles; and surely Miracles, wrought by the most ignorant Persons breathing, will carry as great, or greater Weight with them, than if they were performed by the *greatest Proficients in Science*.

But our Author desires us to ^f *consider on what critical and abstracted kind of Topics such a Course of Proofs as was to be introductory of a new and perfective Revelation, must chiefly have been supposed to turn. Eternal Relations, moral Differences of Things, and a precise Delineation of the Religion of Nature, and its Obligations, were, it seems, so many indispensable preliminary Articles to be treated of in the Way, and inculcated as the Foundation of such an intended Superstructure.* — ^g This has been already con-

^f Page 41, 42.

^g See above p. 68.

sidered ;

sidered; it may suffice to say at present, that the Apostles had nothing to do with these *preliminary Articles*. The Persons they preached to were not, 'tis to be hoped, quite devoid of Reason, or totally ignorant of the first Principles of natural Religion. The *Jews* were brought up in the Knowledge of God; ^h *they knew his Will, and approved the Things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the Law.* ⁱ The Heathen had *the Work of the Law written in their Hearts*; they were not ignorant of the Being of God, and the Distinctions of Virtue and Vice. These were all the *preliminary Articles* necessary to *introduce* the Christian Religion; and these the Apostles did not undertake to prove, but supposed them already known, and appealed to the Understandings and Consciences of their Hearers for the Proof of them. The only thing they were concerned to prove, was their own and our Saviour's Mission; and this they proved chiefly by Miracles, an Argument quick and powerful, and, at the same time, obvious to the meanest Capacities. This was a kind of Proof that required no long Deduction of Reasoning. It might be seen, and judged of, and received on the Spot. There was indeed one preliminary Article necessary to be insisted on, which our Author has not men-

^h Rom. ii. 18.ⁱ Ib. ver. 15.

tioned, *viz.* to prove, from the Predictions of the Old Testament, that *Jesus* was the *Messias* there prophesied of. This may perhaps be thought a *Controversy*, which may require some *Skill and Address to manage*. But I apprehend, that this kind of Proof was attended with much less Difficulty then, than it is now. They had to do with *Jews*, who were, at that very time, in Expectation of a *Messias*; and who acknowledged most of the Points the Apostles had occasion to insist on. They had little else to do, but to refer them to their own Books, and to argue from their Interpretation of those Books. ^k They bid them *search the Scriptures, whether these Things were so*; and only said, — ^l *Believest thou the Prophets?* — in order to *persuade a Man to be a Christian*.

Besides, there is one material Circumstance, which our Author has quite forgot; and that is, that these *Apostles* were assisted by the Spirit of God. Let them be then ever so *unqualified* in themselves *to manage this Controversy*, I hope God was able to qualify them. ^m And accordingly we find, that they did not begin to preach, 'till they were *endued with Power from on High*; that they then *went forth, and preached the Word* with such *Boldness* and Strength of Argu-

^k John v. 39. Acts xvii. 11.

^l Ib. xxvi. 27.

^m Luke xxiv. 49.

ment, ⁿ as their Enemies were amazed to see in such *unlearned and ignorant Men*.
 ° *They gave Witness of the Resurrection with great Power; ^p and spake with such a Wisdom and Spirit, as the ablest of their Adversaries could not resist.* In their Discourses, and in their Writings, we every where find the most sublime and solid Reasoning. These *artless and illiterate Persons* preached more excellent Doctrine, and entertained more noble Sentiments, than any of the wisest of Mankind ever did before them. Here then is what may justly excite our Admiration. *Jesus of Nazareth*, the Son of a poor Carpenter, with a Company of ignorant Fishermen, have given us a more excellent System of Morality, and furnished us with more just and exalted Sentiments of the Deity, than we can meet with in the most celebrated Authors of Antiquity. This, I must own, to me carries with it a strong Presumption of divine Inspiration. This learned Gentleman may, if he pleases, despise them for their Ignorance, ^q and scornfully compare us *Christians* with the *Followers of Mahomet*, *who boasted that their Prophet could neither write nor read, and reckoned it as a most undoubted Mark of his Divinity.* I have nothing to do with the *Followers of*

ⁿ Acts iv. 13.

° Ib. iv. 33.

^p Ib. vi. 10.^q Page 40.

Mahomet; let them make the most of their Boast. I would only desire our Author not to take our Argument by Halves; let him compare the Writings of the Apostles with their Character and Circumstances; and then let him answer me, whether, when Men speak, or write far beyond what their Education would promise, or their known Abilities furnish out, it is not usually judged a Mark of foreign Assistance?

* But we are told, that *St. Paul immediately, from the first Moment of his commencing Apostle, disclaimed all farther Acquaintance with human Learning; and determined to know nothing else amongst his Disciples but Christ crucified, nor to make any Use of the Wisdom of Words, lest the Cross of Christ should be made of none Effect.* — 'Tis true, he did so; but he did not *disclaim all Acquaintance* with Reason and common Sense. He did not prove the Truth of Christianity from Topicks of Philosophy; but he no where tells us, that 'tis *not founded on Argument*. But as these two first Chapters of this Epistle to *the Corinthians* contain some Expressions, which may seem, at first View, to favour our Author's Notions, I shall attempt to explain the Apostle's Design and Meaning more at large, though I might content myself with referring to the

* best Commentators. The chief Design of this Epistle seems to have been, to vindicate his Authority against some false Teachers, who had made a Division in the Church of *Corinth*. These Men, it seems, boasted of their Wisdom and Eloquence; and, in Virtue of these Pretensions, set themselves up in Opposition to St. *Paul*. † One of his Arguments therefore, which he here prosecutes from ver. 17. of Chap. i. is, that the Gospel needed not the Assistance of human Wisdom or Eloquence; that God had generally chosen mean and illiterate Persons to publish it; and that the Truth of it depended upon quite another kind of Arguments, than were used in the Schools of the Philosophers. — *Christ* (he says) *sent him to preach the Gospel, not with Wisdom of Words, lest the Cross of Christ should be made of none Effect*; that is, the Gospel being founded on Truth of Matter of Fact, on the plain Evidence of undeniable Miracles; it needed not, it scorned the Assistance of Sophistry or Rhetorick. It did not set forth any Points of nice Speculation or Philosophy, but only the plain Doctrine of a crucified Saviour; it was a Disparagement to this Doctrine, and derogatory of the Simplicity of the Gospel, to attempt

* See *Locke*, *Hammond*, *Grotius*, Dr. *Clarke's* Sermon on 1 Cor. i. 22. iii. 4. Archbishop *Tillotson* on 1 Cor. i. 23, 24. † 1 Cor. i. 17.

to set it off with the Ornaments of Learning and Oratory.

But, I hope, no Objection can arise from hence against the Gospel. Were an eloquent Pleader in a clear Point to *disclaim*, and forego his wonted *Wisdom of Words*, and suffer the Merits of the Cause to rest solely on the Evidence, it would, I presume, be no Discredit either to the Cause or the Advocate. Again, at ver. 22. the Apostle thus speaks, —^u *The Jews require a Sign, and the Greeks seek after Wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a Stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks Foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the Power of God, and the Wisdom of God.* — The Jews looked for a *temporal Messias*, and expected that God should declare in his Favour, and quash all his Opposers by some Prodigy from Heaven. But when they saw *Jesus*, instead of being thus powerfully supported, delivered to an ignominious Death; this was a great Objection to them, an insuperable Obstacle to their Conversion. *Christ crucified was a Stumbling-block to them.* The Gentiles, on the other Hand, judged of Doctrines by the Eloquence, and Learning, and Artfulness in disputing of those who taught and maintained them; and therefore could not relish the

^u 1 Cor. i. 22.

Plainness and Simplicity of the Gospel. The Doctrine of a crucified Saviour, preached by mean and illiterate Persons, who took no Care to please their Ears with artful Compositions, or gratify their Curiosity with nice and subtle Disputations, appeared to them most strange and ridiculous. — *Christ crucified was to the Greeks Foolishness.* But the Apostle asserts, that, notwithstanding these Prejudices of both *Jews* and *Greeks*, the Doctrine of *Christ* had in Reality both these Sorts of Evidence, which they requir'd, though not just in the Way that they expected. It was attended with the fullest Demonstrations of Divine Power, in the Miracles wrought by *Christ*, and his Apostles; and it had all real Marks of true Wisdom, and could stand the strictest Examination of impartial Reason — *But unto them which are call'd both Jews and Greeks, Christ the Power of God, and the Wisdom of God.* — Neither *Jews* nor *Greeks* are here blamed ^a for demanding the Apostles Credentials, or desiring a Rational Evidence for their Discipleship. St. Paul on the contrary asserts they both of them had such Evidence; but *the Jews* would be contented with no other Sign but miraculous Assistance from Heaven against their Enemies; and *the Greeks* could relish no Wisdom, but in the Way of their Schools; and therefore *the Ar-*

^a See p. 38.

guments, on which Christianity was founded, though in themselves just and conclusive, had no Weight with them. ^b *The seeking after a Sign is therefore check'd and discouraged, because it was seeking what they had. Or, to speak more properly, the Jews are blam'd not for seeking a Sign, but for rejecting all Signs, because they were not just such as they sought for; and the Greeks are censur'd not for their ^c inquisitive Humour, but for want of a due Enquiry; for a blind Attachment to their own preconceiv'd Notions to what they were pleas'd to call Wisdom.* ^d The Apostle proceeds to shew in the remaining Part of this Chapter, that God had generally chosen plain and illiterate Men to publish his Gospel; and by their Means had confounded those, whom the World esteem'd wise and learned. These mean and ignorant Persons had triumph'd over the Opposition of the wise and mighty, and brought about a more effectual Reformation of Manners, than all the Philosophers in the World had ever been able to do. ^e The Apostle begins his second Chapter with assuring us that he himself, when he preach'd the Gospel, did not endeavour to set it off with any Flourishes of Rhetorick or Mixture of Human Learning. What he preach'd was the plain Doctrine of Salvation by *Christ*

^b See p. 49.

^c See p. 38.

^d 1 Cor. i. 26, &c.

^e 1 Cor. ii. 1, &c.

crucified; and this he prov'd not by Arguments drawn from Philosophy, but by *the Testimony of God*. He tells us plainly what were the Arguments he made use of, by *Demonstrations of the Spirit, and of Power*, that is, by plain and undeniable Miracles; and by *comparing spiritual Things with spiritual*, that is, as ^f the best Commentators interpret it, by Arguments drawn from a Comparison of the Prophecies in the Old Testament. ^g He afterwards tells us, that 'tis no Wonder that the Methods and Counsels of God often seem unaccountable to Men. We cannot know the inward Thoughts of one another, much less can we penetrate into the Counsels of the Almighty — ^h *The natural Man receiveth not the Things of the Spirit of God; for they are Foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual, judgeth all Things, yet he himself is judg'd of no Man* — This, it must be own'd, is a difficult Passage, but, I hope may receive Light from the following Interpretation. ⁱ *The natural Man*, I sup-

^f See *Locke, Grotius, Hammond*.

^g 1 Cor. ii. 10.

^h *Y* 14, 15.

ⁱ The Word ψυχικός is generally in Scripture oppos'd to πνευματικός, 1 Cor. xiv. 46. Jude xix. In Jam. iii 15. it seems to signify sensual; and so some interpret it here. But the former Sense seems to me more agreeable to the Context. See *Locke, Hammond, Grotius, Whitby, Claggett's Operations of the Spirit*.

pose, is one unassisted by Revelation, who has no other Help, but his own natural Faculties; by *the Things of the Spirit of God*, I understand his secret Counsels, and Methods of Dealing with Mankind, such as the Method of Redemption by *Christ*, &c. These, though founded in the truest Wisdom, yet are not discoverable by human Reason. Nay, they might seem unaccountable and foolish to the wise and learned of that Age, not because they are really so, but because these Men trusted too much to their own Understanding, and could relish nothing but what tallied with their own false Notions. These Things are beyond the Sphere of our Reason, and *are spiritually discern'd* or known by Revelation only. *The spiritual Man*, he who has the Assistance of Revelation, is alone capable of knowing or *judging* of these Things; while others without the Help of Revelation cannot, from the internal Evidence of the Thing, *judge* whether his Opinions and Doctrines are true or false. This Sense of the Passage seems to be most agreeable to *St. Paul's* main Scope and Design. Nothing could more effectually set forth the Folly of these false Apostles Pretensions to Learning and Wisdom, than to shew that the Doctrines of the Gospel were not discoverable by human Wisdom, nor to be judged of by the mere Light of Reason. But the Reader will easily observe, that this Discourse of the Apostle turns upon the Doctrines of the Gospel, not

upon the Evidences of it. There are some Doctrines of Christianity, we own, which Reason could not have discover'd, and which it cannot fully comprehend, when discover'd; but it by no Means follows from hence, that we have not reasonable Evidence for the Truth of the Gospel itself. The Apostle no where says, that *Christianity is not founded on Argument*; on the contrary he points out the *Arguments* on which it is founded, and asserts it to be the truest Wisdom.

^k But our Author proceeds to tell us, that *all the Apostles Pastoral Charges and Instructions run in the very same Strain*.—I cannot tell what *Pastoral Charges* he means; I have carefully read over the Epistles to *Timothy*, and *Titus*, and can find no such Thing, but just the contrary. ^l These *deputed Successors* are exhorted to *give Attendance to Reading, to Exhortation, to Doctrine*, ^m *to be apt to teach, patient, in Meekness instructing those that oppose themselves*; ⁿ and are forbid to ordain any others for *their Successors*, but such as are *able by sound Doctrine both to exhort, and to convince the Gain-sayers*.

^o But we must not look for *Exactness in Point of Criticism* here. These *Pastoral Instructions* are, it seems, to be found (where I

^k Pag. 40.

^l 1 Tim. iv. 13.

^m 2 Tim. ii. 24,

25. ⁿ Tit. i. 9.

^o See p. 105.

should never have look'd for them) in the Epistle to *the Romans*. ^p The Apostle, we are told, is there giving *Directions for the Treatment of a Novice, who might happen to be not yet quite so thoroughly in the Persuasion*. — ^q *Him that is weak in the Faith receive, Yes; — but how? Why to instruct him better — not by any Means to confute or argue with him — not to doubtful Disputations*. — One might well ask who this Gentleman imagines these weak Persons to be; some Sect of Philosophers, it may be suppos'd, who were just converted, who lived upon ^r *Herbs*, and ^s *neither eat Flesh, nor drank Wine*. Let me only desire him to read on to the next Verse, and there he may see that the Apostle is speaking not of *Novices*, but of Christians, who were, as far as appears, *thoroughly in the Persuasion*. Their *Weakness* consisted not in any Doubtfulness about the Truth of their Religion, but in some unnecessary Scruples about the Use of indifferent Things. — *For one believeth that he may eat all Things; another that is weak, eateth Herbs*. — The Apostle exhorts other Christians, who were better inform'd, to *receive* such Persons into their Friendship and Conversation — *but not to doubtful Disputations*, that is, if you will, not to engage in unnecessary Disputes and Controversies about

^p Pag. 41.

^q Rom. xiv. 1.

^r y 2.

^s y 21.

such Things. † But I should rather prefer our Marginal Reading, which translates this latter Clause ——— *not to judge his doubtful Thoughts.* The Apostle, according to this Sense of the Words, forbids Christians to pass rash Judgments on their Brethren on account of any Misperceptions in such Matters as these. This Sense is indeed very wide from our Author's Purpose; but it is more agreeable to the Context, and to the Import of the Original Words. However, the Gentleman may chuse which Sense he pleases; only let me beseech him, for his Reader's sake, and for his own, not to run away with the Sound of a Word — *weak in the Faith — doubtful Disputations* — but to have the Patience to read over a whole Chapter before he makes Quotations from it. But perhaps this is too much to ask; he would then find nothing to his Purpose.

‡ Another Argument our Author insists on, is *the sudden Conversion of many, upon little, or no, seeming Evidence*, which, he imagines, cannot be accounted for on any other Scheme but his own. His first Instance of this Kind, is *St. Matthew's Call and Conversion.* He thinks *it would seem strange, humanly consider'd, he should thus precipitately desert a beneficial Employment for he knew not whom.* — Supposing the Case were as our Au-

† See *Hammond, Grotius.* ‡ Page 65. * Matt. ix. 9.
thor

thor represents it, can we argue from one particular Instance to the Case of *Christians* in general? Supposing *Christ* had converted a Person he designed for an Apostle and Evangelist, by an Act of extraordinary Power, will it follow that all *Christians* are to expect the like? But the Truth is, St. *Matthew* was not called now to be a Disciple, but a personal Attendant on *Christ*. The Gospel was preached to all the *Jews* in general, and all were called upon to believe in *Christ*. But, among these, some few in particular were chosen out, and called upon to be immediate Attendants upon his Person, and Assistants to him in preaching the Gospel. These two Calls are plainly distinguished in the Case of St. *Andrew* and St. *Peter*. ^w They were converted, and believed in *Christ* on the Testimony of *John the Baptist*. ^x But after this they returned home, and continued to follow their Employment, 'till, some time afterwards, he called them *to follow him*; and then *they forsook all*, and became, from that Time, constant Attendants on him. It is in the same manner plain, that this Call of St. *Matthew* was no common Call: — ^y *He left all, rose up, and followed him*. — I hope this Gentleman does not imagine, that our Saviour required all the *Jews* to quit their Trades and Employments, and part

^w John i. 35.^x Matth. iv. 18.^y Luke v. 28.

with all that they had. *St. Matthew* had doubtless before heard of the Fame of *Christ*, and probably had seen Miracles done by him. ^a He was convinced by *what he had seen before*, and was become his *Disciple*, without waiting for a particular Address. Thus convinced he thought himself, both in Duty and Prudence, bound to obey this extraordinary Call; and comply at once, though at the Loss of his Livelibood. ^b Our Author may esteem Things present beyond the most valuable Reversions; and prefer sitting at the Receipt of Custom before the Hopes of Immortality. But *St. Matthew* had other Sentiments: ^c He did not follow *he knew not whom*. He was on reasonable Grounds convinced, that *Jesus* was the *Christ*. He knew whom he had believed; ^d and was fully persuaded, that he was able to reward him with an hundred fold in this World, and in the World to come with eternal Life.

^e In the next Place, our Author falls very severely upon the *Samaritans*, ^f for believing in *Christ* so readily for the Saying of the Woman. — A notable Foundation truly for Confidence and Conviction, and perhaps Martyrdom. — I do not think myself any way concerned to vindicate these *Samaritans*; their Faith is no where, as I know of, commend-

^a See p. 65, 66.^b See p. 32.^c See p. 65.^d Mark x. 30.^e P. 66.^f John iv. 39.

ed in Scripture. But this Gentleman should first have known what *Foundation* they had for their Confidence and Conviction, before he made so light of it. These Samaritans had a general Expectation of a *Messias* to appear about that Time; this Discovery, which our Saviour made of *this Woman's* secret Sins, which brought her to a fair Confession, might (for ought our Author knows) have been attended with such extraordinary Circumstances, as might reasonably incline them to believe there was something extraordinary in the Person, who made such a Discovery: The Secrets thus brought to Light, might be of such a Nature, as could not be well known to any one, but to him *who knoweth the Hearts*. But, however this be, we are certain, that none of these Samaritans were ever called to be *Martyrs* on this Foundation only. ^c *Christ* himself immediately after preached amongst them in such a manner as convinced many, who would not give Credit to *this Woman*. ^d And afterwards his Apostles preached, and wrought many singular Miracles amongst them.

To these we may add some other Cases, where the Scriptures seem to blame Men for not believing without Evidence, or commend them for believing with little or no Reason. One Instance follows here: — ^e O

^c John iv. 41, 42.
Luke xxiv. 25.

^d Acts viii. 5, &c.

^e P. 66.

Fools, and slow to believe. — And all this, can you imagine, only because these two poor deluded Travellers, were involved only in a national, and, humanly speaking, a very natural Misapprehension with regard to the Nature of their promised Deliverance? Besides, God would not reproach any of his Creatures with a defective Intellect, where he was pleased to give them no better. — And what of all this? The Charge, as far as I can find, amounted to this: These poor deluded Travellers had a defective Intellect. And our Saviour called them Fools. — But God was pleased to give them no better, — says our Author. We cannot but think these Disciples might have known better. The Jewish Records, though mysterious, yet plainly enough point out a suffering Messias. — But these Disciples were misled by the general Sense of their Country, and the authentick Determinations of their ablest Doctors. — They might be so very innocently; but had they not been now, for some time, Disciples and Hearers of Christ? Had he not, before this, frequently instructed them in the Nature of his Kingdom? And did it not argue some Folly and Slowness to profit no better by his Instructions? After all, what Method does Christ take with these Disciples? † Does he give them up instantly to the Hardness of their Hearts with-

† See p. 67.

out Remedy, for a rebellious Refusal and Disclaim of proffered Grace? ^s Or does he secretly whisper immediate Conviction to them? No, he proceeds in a rational Way; ^h and expounds unto them in all the Scriptures the Things concerning himself.

In Page 79 we have some other Cases of the like Nature: — *With what Severity* (says our Author) *does our Lord reprove the Sin of Infidelity in his Disciples, for imagining they were going to be drowned, when their Vessel was actually sinking under them, and it had been, from all Appearance, a Sin against common Sense to have thought any otherwise?* — But the Scripture represents neither the Danger of *these Disciples*, nor the Severity of our Lord's Reproof, in so strong a Light as this Writer would place it. — ⁱ *There arose a great Tempest: The Ship was covered with the Waves; their Lord was asleep; the Disciples despond; Christ saith unto them, — Why are ye fearful, O ye of little Faith?* A Reproof surely mild enough. — He had now wrought Miracles amongst them for near two Years. They had seen him *heal the Sick, cast out Devils, cure the Blind, the Lame, and the Deaf*: And, after all this, did *Common Sense* teach them to think he could not save himself and his Disciples? Was it not rather *Nonsense* to doubt of his

^s See p. 56.

^h Luke xxiv. 27.

ⁱ Matth. viii. 24.

Power or Care of them? Might they not have reasonably presumed they were under the peculiar Protection of Heaven, when the *Son of God* was with them? Our Saviour at least might ask them, *Why they were afraid*; why they had so poor an Opinion of his Power, without any Imputation of *Severity*?

Another Instance produced by our Author, is that of *Zacharias*: ^k *In like manner* (says he) *was Zacharias struck dumb on the Spot, for only hesitating upon what carried, according to the common Course of Nature, the highest Face of Impossibility.* — But surely the common Course of Nature is quite out of the Question in such Cases as these. *Zacharias* seems to have had no Doubt about the Reality of the Appearance: His Objection was, ^l *that he was an old Man, and his Wife well stricken in Years.* But this was an unreasonable Objection: he might, and ought to have considered, that *with God nothing is impossible.* However, the Scripture does not represent either his Sin, or his Punishment, as very grievous. He was deprived of his Speech for a short Season; and this was intended, as well for a Sign to assure him and others of the Truth of the Prophecy, as for a Punishment of his Incredulity.

^m *Abraham, the Father of the Faithful, is*

brought next upon the Stage, and a Sneer bestowed upon his *Faith*: — ^a *He, against all Hope, i. e. contrary to all human Probability, believed in Hope; and considered not (what one would imagine should have offered itself the first to his Consideration) all the natural Impediments that seemed to render the promised Event impracticable.* — I might ask here again, what have *human Improbability* and *natural Impediments* to do in this Case? But I hope this Gentleman will be fully satisfied, when he comes to find, that this was really the very *first* thing that *offered itself to Abraham's Consideration*. Let him then turn to *Gen. xxi. 17.* and there he will read, that, when God promised him a Son by his Wife *Sarah*, he *fell upon his Face and laughed, and said in his Heart, Shall a Child be born unto him that is an hundred Years old? And shall Sarah, that is ninety Years old bear?* But when God still continued to assure him, that *Sarah his Wife should bear him a Son indeed*; he then thought it was Time to have done *considering the natural Impediments*: ° *Is any Thing too hard for the Lord? Is not the Power of God able to surmount all natural Impediments, all human Improbabilities?* This Gentleman will not, I hope, say it is an unreasonable Persuasion to believe, that ^p *what*

^a Rom. iv. 18.

° Gen. xviii. 14.

^p Rom. iv. 21.

God has promised, he is able also to perform. When therefore we have the sure Promise of God, it is a rational Faith to *believe in Hope, even against Hope, and contrary to all human Probability.* And accordingly we find, that *Abraham* was not disappointed of his *Hope*; *Sarah* his *Wife* did bear him a *Son* indeed. And he learnt by Experience what before Reason and Religion had taught him, that *with God nothing was impossible.*

Another Argument against using our Understanding in Matters of Religion, is drawn from some Texts of Scripture, which seem to discourage, and decry *human Wisdom and Philosophy.* But is it all sort of *Wisdom and Philosophy* that the Scripture condemns? The very Texts our Author has quoted will testify the contrary. It is such *Wisdom* as led not to the *Knowledge of God.* Such *Wisdom* as was not only *earthly, but sensual, and devilish*; the Parent of *Envying and Strife, Confusion, and every evil Work.* Such *Philosophy* as had only a *Shew of Wisdom*; such as was the Source of *vain Deceit*, and taught its Votaries to observe the *Traditions of Men, and to worship Angels*; that alone stands censured in those very Passages he alludes to. I hope this Gentleman will not be an Advo-

³ Pag. 73, 74.

¹ 1 Cor. i. 21.

⁵ Jam. iii. 15, 16.

⁷ Col. ii. 8, 18, 23.

cate for such *Philosophy* as this; he is not surely so foolishly fond of *Wisdom*, as to patronize every thing which usurps the Name. There are indeed two Sorts of *wise Men* we find censured in the Writings of the Apostles. First, the *Heathen* Philosophers; and this not because they were really *wise*, but because they were *wise* only in their own Imaginations; because ^u *professing themselves to be wise, they became Fools.* ^w *The World* (says St. Paul) *by Wisdom knew not God.* They might indeed have known him by the Light of Reason; for the same Apostle tells us, that ^x *the invisible Things of him from the Creation of the World are clearly seen.* ^y *But they became vain in their Imaginations,* ^z *and did not like to retain God in their Knowledge;* and therefore *their foolish Heart was darkened.* Their boasted Wisdom did not lead them either to the Knowledge of God, or the Practice of Virtue; they lived in the grossest Idolatry, and practised the most abominable Vices. The Doctrine of far the greatest Part of the Philosophers consisted in little else but Words, and Subtlety, and empty Contention. Each adhered obstinately to the Notions of his own Sect; and could relish nothing but what was agreeable to their own preconceived Opinions, and

^u Rom. i. 22.

^w 1 Cor. i. 21.

^x Rom. i. 20.

^y Ib. ver. 21.

^z Ib. ver. 28.

came recommended by their own Arts of Sophistry and Rhetorick. This is the Account the Scriptures give us of the Philosophy of those Times: This Accusation is not only confidently maintained against them by the *Christian* Apologists, but is acknowledged by the best *Heathen* Authors. I shall only mention two Passages out of *Cicero*.—

^a *Plerique Philosophorum errare malunt, eamque sententiam, quam adamaverunt, pertinacissime defendere, quam sine pertinaciâ, quid constantissimè dicatur, exquirere.*—And again, — ^b *Quotusquisque Philosophorum invenitur, qui sit ita moratus, ita animo ac vitâ constitutus, ut Ratio postulat? qui Disciplinam suam non Ostentationem Scientiæ, sed Legem Vitæ putet? qui obtemperet ipse sibi, & Decretis suis pareat? Videre licet alios tantâ Levitate & Jactatione, iis ut fuerit non didicisse melius: alios Pecuniæ cupidos, Gloriæ nonnullos: multos Libidinum servos.*—

There is another sort of wise Men, which the Scriptures speak contemptibly of; and those were some false Teachers, who then infested the Church. These Men pretended to greater Degrees of Knowledge and Illumination than other Christians, and from thence were called *Gnosticks*; but they

^a Cicero Acad. Quæst. Lib. I.
Lib. II.

^b Ib. Tusc. Quæst.

taught the grossest Absurdities, and practised the vilest Enormities. In some of their Sentiments they agreed with our Author: ^c They thought *Martyrdom* no better than *Folly*; they were resolved to *make sure of something*, and would not, on any Consideration, part with *the Enjoyments already in their Power*. ^d This then is *the Philosophy and vain Deceit*; ^e these *the perverse Disputings of Men of corrupt Minds*; ^f this *the Science falsely so called*; ^g this *the earthly, sensual, and devilish Wisdom*, which the Scripture so severely condemns. But the Scripture no where censures, or discourages the Use of sound Reason, and true Wisdom. — ^h *Happy is the Man (saith Solomon) that findeth Wisdom, and that getteth Understanding*. — ⁱ The Apostles assure us, that the *Spirit of Christianity is the Spirit of a sound Mind*; they exhort us ^k *to ask Wisdom of God*; ^l *to add to our Virtue Knowledge*; ^m *to prove all Things*; ⁿ and to be ready always to give an Answer to every Man that asketh us a Reason of the Hope that is in us.

^o But we are told, that our Saviour himself declares, ^p *that no Man can receive the Gospel, except he receive it as a little Child*; that is, as this Writer, ingeniously paraphrases it, in

^c See p. 32.

^f Ib. ver. 20.

ⁱ 2 Tim. i. 7.

^m 2 Theff. v. 21.

^p Mark x. 15.

^d Col. ii. 8.

^g Jam. iii. 15.

^k Jam. i. 5.

ⁿ 1 Pet. iii. 15.

^e 1 Tim. vi. 5.

^h Prov. iii. 13.

^l 2 Pet. i. 5.

^o Page 75.

the Impotence and Impuberty of a dutiful Understanding; in the tractable Simplicity of unpractised Reason; not with the Claims of a self-sufficient Disputant; the haughty and arrogant Spirit of a replying Academick, but with all the obsequious Submission, and humble Acquiescence of a Babe, who has no other Disposition but to learn his Lesson. — How artfully are Truth and Falshood here blended together? How ingeniously are Innocence and Folly, a teachable Disposition and implicit Faith confounded! But I must beg Leave to ask this ingenious Commentator a Question or two. First then, why does he alter the Text? It is in the Original: — *Whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little Child.* — Now I should think all this relates, not to Matters of Faith, but Practice — *Whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God; that is, who does not enter upon the Christian Profession with the Innocence and Simplicity of a Child, shall not enter therein; that is, shall not be accepted as a Christian.* But supposing this Expression to include Matters of Faith; yet why must it relate to the Truth of the Gospel? Let the Truth of our Religion be enquired into with all Freedom; but when that is once fairly settled, it is but reasonable to lay aside *the haughty and arrogant Spirit of a replying Academick.* When once we are, upon reasonable Grounds, fully convinced that the Gospel is the Word of God; we ought surely

ly to receive its Doctrines, and learn our Lesson *with obsequious Submission and humble Acquiescence*. But let us take the Words in his own Sense, he who enquires into the Truth of Religion, may still find something worthy his Imitation in the Character of *little Children*, without turning Changeling. He may divest himself of all unreasonable Prejudices, all *Haughtiness, Arrrogance, and Self-sufficiency*; be teachable without Credulity, innocent without Folly, and *humble* without an *obsequious* and blind *Submission*. St. Paul, I hope, may be supposed to understand his Master's Meaning: But he says, — ^p *Be not Children in Understanding; howbeit in Malice be ye Children, but in Understanding be Men.* — And again, — ^q *I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil.* — Our Saviour at least may be allowed to explain his own Meaning; but he admonishes his Disciples ^r *to be wise as Serpents, and harmless as Doves.*

I have now gone through all our Author's Objections from Scripture, excepting about three or four; and those, I believe, my Readers would easily excuse me from taking Notice of. In Page 65 our Author thus argues: *We beseech you, Brethren, says the Apostle, that you all speak the same Thing. — That ye be all perfectly of the same Mind,*

^p 1 Cor. xiv. 20. ^q Rom. xvi. 19. ^r Matth. x. 16.

and the same Judgment. *A strange Request this, 'till we come to consider the Character and Doctrine of the Speaker, and the Means by which he desired it should be effected, which is explained to us in another Place, with the Repetition of the like Demand: The God of all Consolation grant you to be like-minded. — This may be strange, Sir, to you; but it is full as strange to us, that you should mistake an Exhortation to Peace and Unity, for an Injunction to all Men to think all alike in all Points. * You yourself have taught us to say, that though Men cannot be all of one Opinion in every Thing, they may be of one Faith, which they hold, notwithstanding their Diversity of Opinions in other Matters, in the Bond of Peace, and Unity of Spirit. But these, I suppose, are some of † those particular Texts, which our Author has quoted, as they happened to occur to his Memory. He has but a bad Memory, poor Man, a very treacherous Memory indeed, to remember only just what suited his purpose, and forget all the rest, which must have led his Reader into the Apostle's true Meaning. I need not acquaint the Reader, that the Apostle, in both Places, speaks with Reference to Divisions, which then obtained in the Churches of Corinth and Rome. The Corinthians were divided*

* Page 76.

† See p. 105.

into Parties, and listed themselves separately under different Teachers and Leaders: At *Rome* there was a Division between the *Jewish* and *Gentile* Converts about the Lawfulness of indifferent Things: The one therefore *St. Paul* beseeches to unite together in a Belief of the Gospel, without any such Distinctions of Teachers or Leaders; the others he is so far from requiring to think all alike, that he wishes them to live in Peace and Unity, notwithstanding their Diversity of Opinions. But I need not, I say, go so far back as to inquire into the Occasion and Scope of what is here said: I need only give the Words themselves. I shall transcribe the whole of the Passages our Author refers to, and they will answer him: — ^v *Now I beseech you, Brethren, by the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same Thing, and that there be no Divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same Mind, and in the same Judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my Brethren, by them which are of the House of Chloe, that there are Contentions among you. Now this, I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ. —*^w The other Passage runs thus: — *Now the God of Patience and Consolation grant you to*

^v 1 Cor. i. 10.

^w Rom. xv. 5.

be like-minded one towards another, according to (or after the Example of) Christ Jesus; that ye may, with one Mind and one Mouth, glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us, to the Glory of God. — * This Author has doubtless a Right to censure others for arguing from *a strange Misapplication of a straggling Text, some faint Outline, which seemed, they fancied, to countenance their Notions.* He scorns to lay hold of *a straggling Text*; he can go fetch *a Text* from the midst of the Enemy; and, though every Line and Word around is pointed against him, can carry it off triumphant without Fear or Shame.

Another worthy Application of a Text we have Page 68. — † *The Word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with Faith in them that heard it.* — But I cannot easily find, what Sense our Author would make of these Words: Does he think the Apostle requires Men to believe *the Word* before they *heard it*? Or does *Faith* signify such previous Dispositions as may be necessary to give *the Word* its due Efficacy? ‡ Some such Dispositions are necessary on his own Scheme: And we may still maintain, that *Christianity is founded on Reason*, tho'

* Page 77.

† Heb. iv. 2.

‡ See p. 63.

every

every Man is not disposed to hearken to it. But, after all, the plain Sense of the Words is no more than this: — *The Word did not profit them*, because they did not believe it; and, pray, how should it? Again at Page 84 our Author tells us, that *we are strictly enjoined to captivate our Reason to the Obedience of Faith*. — But I can find no such Injunction in all the Bible. I suppose indeed he may have in his Eye 2 Cor. x. 5. *Casting down Imaginations, and every high Thing that exalteth itself against the Knowledge of God, and bringing into Captivity every Thought to the Obedience of Christ*. — But the Apostle is not here giving any Injunctions to others, but speaks in his own Person. * He threatens to inflict some extraordinary Punishment on those, who opposed him at Corinth; and, by that Means, demonstrate the Weakness of their high Pretences to Knowledge, and reduce all Men to the Acknowledgment and Practice of the Truth.

Our Author adds, — ^b *Is not carnal Wisdom, viz. the Result of human Reason every where industriously decry'd in the Affair of believing?* — The Answer is short: — No. *Fleshly or carnal Wisdom* is never, I think, mentioned but once in Scripture, and that is, 2 Cor. i. 12. and there it has no Relation to the *Affair of believing*; nor does it signify

* See Locke and Hammond.

^b Page 84.

the Result of human Reason, but worldly Policy and Cunning.

We have another extraordinary Quotation Page 79, — *He that cometh to Christ, must believe that he is.* — The Apostle indeed says. — ^c *He that cometh to God, must believe that he is*; and the Sense is plain enough; — No one can worship or serve God, unless he is first persuaded of his Existence. But what Sense our Author will make of *his* Scripture, he best knows. He does indeed make fine Sense of it. — *In Faith* (he says) *it is a necessary Preliminary* — *He that cometh to Christ, must believe that he is.* — So, it seems, — *Believing is a necessary Preliminary to Faith.* — This borders very near upon Nonsense; but the Scripture, and the Interpretation, are both his own. But, I suppose, these are some of ^d *the Inadvertencies he bespeaks our Candour for* — easy and natural Mistakes, when a Man quotes from his *Memory*. But I cannot but observe, that what I have before me, is the second Edition of this curious Piece; which, I have been told, has received some Alterations and Corrections. There have too, I think, in the mean while been published two or three excellent Answers to his Book, which might have rubbed up his *Memory*, and discovered to him his *Mistakes* and *Mis-*

^c Heb. xi. 5.

^d See p. 105.

applications. But he still continues to repeat the same *Mistakes*, still persists incorrigibly to palm upon us false Scripture and false Fact. What can be said for him? Is he an inspired Person, and, as such, has a Right to interpret, alter, and make Scripture as he pleases? Or has he a Dispensation from the *Pope*? And does he hold that we, Hereticks, have no Right to the Truth?

There are some other Texts, which our Author has produced in Proof and Support of his own Scheme; but these will come more properly to be considered in the next Chapter: I shall conclude this with a short Explication of two or three Passages of Scripture he has been pleased to throw out occasional Reflections upon.

The first of these is, 1 *Thess.* v. 21. *Prove all Things; hold fast that which is good.*— But our Author is pleased to contradict the Apostle, however ill it may become the Character he has assumed. ^e It is a *hopeful Task*, he tells us, *to prove all Things*; and assures us, that, if we aim at proving all Things, ^f *we shall never hold fast any Thing.* — I am persuaded, if this Gentleman had met with this Sentence among the *Aphorisms of Hippocrates*, he would have let it pass uncensured, perhaps would have extolled the Wisdom of it. I should not then have had

Occasion to tell him, that such general Rules are always to be understood with some Exceptions and Restrictions; that the Duty of *proving all Things*, must vary in proportion to each Man's Circumstances and Abilities, and can reasonably extend only to such Things, as fall properly in the Way of our Enquiry; that a Man may *hold a good Thing very fast*, and yet be ready to part with it, when he finds good Reason so to do. There is, as I have observed before, a Medium between Scepticism and Bigotry. It is neither reasonable to continue unalterably fixed to our present Persuasion, without Examination or Enquiry; nor to be always proving, and resting in nothing; *always learning, and never coming to the Knowledge of the Truth*. The proper Conduct, which the Apostle here requires of us, lies between these two Extremes. Let us examine carefully into the Truth of our Religion, and pursue our Enquiry, as far as is requisite to such a just and reasonable Satisfaction, as an honest and conscientious Man may safely rest in. It is then reasonable to shut up our Enquiry, and to adhere stedfastly to what we are thus satisfied in, and direct our Practice accordingly. We need not, nor ought, on every slight Surmise, to enter upon a Re-examination of our Opinions. But if any new Doctrines offer themselves to us, which may reasonably demand a farther Enquiry; if there appears
good

good Grounds to suspect our former Persuasion, we may then enter upon a new Examination with the same Care and Impartiality, as we did before. If the Reader requires farther Satisfaction on this Head, he may find it in the judicious Dr. Rogers's Sermons on this Text.

^s Another Text our Author takes notice of is 1 Cor. xiv. 15. *I will pray with the Spirit, and I will pray with the Understanding also.* — From whence he would infer, that a Man may pray with the Spirit, and not with the Understanding. — The Apostle is here speaking of *praying in an unknown Tongue*; but he does not mean, that the Person thus praying, did not himself understand what he said. On the contrary he expressly says, ^h *that he that speaketh in an unknown Tongue, edifieth himself.* But he objects that, by this Means, the Church did not receive edifying: — ⁱ *If I come unto you speaking with Tongues, what shall I profit you?* — Again, ^k *Except ye utter by the Tongue Words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken?* Again, — ^l *Seek that ye may excel, to the edifying of the Church.* — Once more, ^m *Else when thou shalt blest with the Spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the Unlearned, say Amen at thy giv-*

^s Page 76.

^h Ver. 4.

ⁱ Ver. 6.

^k Ver. 9.

^l Ver. 12.

^m Ver. 16.

ing of Thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest? ^a From all which it is evident, that by *praying with the Understanding* is here meant, praying in such a manner that he might be understood by others. ^o The Reader, for his farther Satisfaction, may consult Mr. *Locke's* Paraphrase and Comment.

The last Passage of Scripture I shall here consider, is where ^p St. *John* admonishes his Disciples, *to try the Spirits whether they are of God*; and the Test he gives them whereby they may try the Spirits is, — *Every Spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the Flesh, is of God; and every Spirit that confesseth not, that Jesus Christ is come in the Flesh, is not of God.* — ^q Here our Author objects, that *this is evidently what Philosophers call, arguing in a Circle, and begging the Question.* — But if we consider, who the Apostle is speaking to, and and what he is speaking of, we shall easily free him from this Circle. ^r The Apostle is speaking to *Christians*, not with Design to prove the Truth of *Christianity*, which they already believed, but to warn them against some Seducers, who were themselves also professed *Christians*; but denied some of the most important Articles of the Christian

^a See also ver. 19.

^o See also *Jac. Cappellus*.

^p 1 John iv. 1, 2, 3.

^q P. 78.

^r See Bulli

Opera, p. 296.

Faith. Such were *Ebion* and *Cerinthus*, who called themselves *Christians*, and pretended to extraordinary Inspiration, but denied the Truth of our Saviour's Incarnation. Here then were two Sets of Persons pretending to divine Inspiration, the Apostles, and these new Teachers. St. *John* here gives a plain Rule how *Christians*, already instructed in the Articles of the Christian Faith, might try whose Pretences were just, viz. by their Doctrine. Those who denied *Christ's* Incarnation, were plainly false Prophets; while those, who were orthodox in this important Article, were to be admitted as Persons they could have no just Exception against. It was not, as I apprehend, the Apostle's Intention to deliver a general Criterion, whereby all *Spirits* might always be tried. He does not mean that all Prophets, who acknowledged this Doctrine, were to be admitted, however erroneous they were in other Points. He designed this only as a Rule suited to that particular Occasion, whereby Christians of those Times might judge which of the two they were to follow, St. *John*, or *Ebion* and *Cerinthus*. But I ought to acquaint my Reader, that the learned Dr. *Hammond* puts a different Interpretation on these Words: By confessing that *Jesus Christ* is come in the *Flesh*, he understands not the bare Belief of the Christian Religion, but the confessing this Faith before Men in

Times of Difficulty and Persecution. These Seducers, it seems, thought they called themselves Christians, yet were not willing to suffer Martyrdom for *Christ's* sake; but publicly maintained it to be lawful to deny him on such Occasions. Dr. *Hammond* therefore supposes, that St. *John* here gives this as a Test, whereby they might distinguish true Prophets from false. Those who were willing to suffer for *Christ's* sake, might justly be esteemed true Prophets; but those, who renounced or forsook him in the Time of Persecution, thereby plainly shewed themselves to be *not of God*.

CH A P. IV.

HAVING now examined our Author's Objections, both from Reason and Scripture, against a rational Faith, it remains to enquire what he would give us in the Room of it; to consider *the Means* he recommends to us *for coming at the Knowledge of divine Truths*. — ^a *It is nothing less than Omniscience and Omnipresence itself, which is to irradiate our Souls at once with a thorough Conviction, and perform more by one secret Whisper, than a thousand clamorous Harangues from the Schools.* ^b *It is, in*

^a Page 56.

^b P. 58.

the first Place, universal, and yet not one in ten thousand is conscious, that he ever either received or resisted this thorough Conviction. ^c It is to make us think all alike; though ^d the only Method in Nature of effecting this, is to put out all our Eyes. This is of Authority and Force sufficient to countermand effectually against the most violent Assaults of Temptation. It is of immediate Influence, and operates without Delay, though (like Seed sown in the Ground) the Progress and Method of its Advances shall be sure to escape our nicest Observation. ^e It flashes Conviction in a Moment by an irresistible Light from Heaven; it completes our Faith in an Instant, and produces at once the most perfect and finished Creed. Its Dictates are, as it were, self-evident: In this the Sum and Substance of all Argumentation is briefly comprized, the very Spirit and Extract of all-convicting Power, of a Nature perhaps but little differing from that of Intuition itself. ^f The Characters thus stamped upon the living Tablets of our Hearts are indelible; such as no Misrepresentations can ever possibly intervene to corrupt, or shake its Authority in our Minds. ^g And this our faithful Monitor and Guardian has promised to abide with us to the End of the World, that we might

^c Page 89.

^d P. 108.

^e P. 59.

^f P. 60.

^g Ibid.

not be left liable one Moment to a Possibility of Error and Imposition. These would be, it must be owned, most effectual and infallible Means to *come at the Knowledge of divine Truths.* But, alas! the Scene will soon be changed. ^h We shall find in a Page or two, that this ⁱ *infallible*, ^k *instantaneous*, ^l *universal*, and *effectual Irradiation*; this *certain, self-evident, irresistible Light from Heaven*, which does not leave ^m *us liable to a Possibility of Error and Imposition*, must yet, like a rational Faith, *depend greatly upon the proper Disposition of our Minds to give it Reception for its Efficacy.* We may resist this *irresistible Light*, and not be convinced by this *thorough Conviction.* We may be insensible of this *strong and palpable internal Sense*; not perceive what is, ⁿ *as it were, self-evident*; nor see what is known in a manner ⁿ *perhaps but little differing from that of Intuition itself.* ^o This Principle is to *make us virtuous against our Inclinations*; and yet ^p *its Efficacy depends upon the proper Disposition of our Minds*, that is, on our *Inclinations.* ^q *It is universal*; but now we find that it operates only on some few particular Persons; it is only ^r *ten-*

^h Page 63.ⁱ P. 56.^k P. 59.^l P. 58.^m P. 60.ⁿ Observe how cautiously this accurate Writer expresses himself, — *as it were*, — *perhaps*, — *but little differing.*

• P. 30.

^p P. 63.^q P. 30.^r P. 63.

dered universally; and so we say is a Rational Faith. It is to bring ^s *all Men to think all alike*; but we find now 'tis only those who are ^t *disposed to give it Reception*, and so will a rational Faith, *such as Books may furnish*, if our ^u *Infidelity of Spirit* did not render its Operations of no Effect. ^w *It is of immediate Influence, and operates without Delay*: And yet Men may suspend or frustrate its Influence, as they do that of Reason, by their ^x *Obstinacy, Impiety, and Perverseness*. I need not, I presume, spend much Time in confuting this ^y *ridiculous Jargon*. To express myself in our Author's own polite Language: It is *such a Scheme at first View, as no Pretence of Authority, human or divine, can command any Regard or Attention to, or indeed any Notice, but that of the Contempt due to Paradoxes, the most eminently impudent and ridiculous*. Strange is it indeed, that a Man should attempt to prove by Argument, that ^v *Reason is changeable, precarious, and uncertain*; or by Scripture, ^z *that the Scripture is a dead Letter, absolutely defective and insufficient for any revealing Purpose*. As his Scheme is, in its own Nature, incapable of Proof; so has he fairly precluded himself from all Methods of proving it. Will he argue from Reason? But he has told

^s See p. 58.

^t P. 63.

^u Page 68, 69.

^w P. 58.

^x P. 64.

^y P. 26

^z P. 61.

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us, ^b that 'tis not her *proper Province to judge at all of religious Matters*; nor is this an *Affair, where she has any Concerns*. Will he argue from Scripture? But he has told us, ^c that the Scripture is only a *suspicious Repository of human Testimony*: and that nothing in it can now deserve our least Notice, or be thought of Consequence to engage a Moment's Attention. What Method of Proof then can he invent? I presume he does not pretend to work Miracles: if he does, ^d *Miracles have* (he says) *been perform'd in favour of false Doctrines, and therefore cannot of themselves alone be any certain Marks of a true*. How then are we to be convinced of this *Witness of the Spirit*? Perhaps he will say, we have it within us, and may be convinced of it by ^e *a strong and palpable internal Sense*. Why then, truly, our Author might have spared his painful Labours: If this be the Case, ^f *it stands in no Need of any such far-fetched Apologies, and laboured Accounts to reconcile and explain it*. He might as well have wrote a Book to convince us, that our Eye sees, or our Heart beats. But, it seems, ^g *the Efficacy of this Conviction depends greatly upon the proper Disposition of our Minds*. And what is this proper Disposition? — ^h We may, by our *Obstinacy*,

^b Page 7.

^f P. 21.

^c P. 59.

^g P. 63.

^d P. 46.

^h P. 64.

^e P. 58.

Impiety,

Impiety, and Perverseness; c by our Ingratitude, Neglect, and Infidelity of Spirit, render its Operations of no Effect. Had then this Gentleman exhorted us to cultivate such a *Disposition*, had he persuaded us to banish from our Hearts all *Obstinacy, Impiety, and Infidelity of Spirit*, he would have been wisely and usefully employed. But the Tendency of his whole Book is directly contrary: He has, (as I have frequently had Occasion to shew) instead of this, taken the ready Method to overthrow all natural Religion, as well as revealed. ^d The Belief of a God, according to him, is *not founded on Argument*. Are *Piety* then and *Gratitude Dispositions* previous to the Belief of a Deity? Besides, I would ask, whether these proper *Dispositions* are natural or acquired? If they are natural, ^e *the Want of them* can never be a *Crime*. If they are then to be acquired, how are we to acquire them? And what Motive have we to cultivate them? Will *Reason* guard us against *Impiety, Perverseness, and Infidelity of Spirit*? But ^f *this boasted Ally* may not raise her Forces Time enough to come into our Protection. Besides, ^g *few Men* are qualified for reasoning at all; ^h and the ablest and best of Men are disqualified for fair Reasoning by their natural

^c Pag. 68, 69.

^d P. 81.

^e P. 63.

^f P. 14.

^g P. 17.

^h P. 23.

*Prejudices; * and Reason itself is precarious and changeable, and † can never have Force enough to make us virtuous against our Inclinations. ‡ See here the constant and unavoidable Fate of every System, that sets out upon an Absurdity.*

But I must do our Author the Justice to own, that I have a better Opinion of his Judgment, than to think he can seriously maintain such Paradoxes. I presume it was not his Intention to build up, but to pull down. Religion was to be expos'd under the Mask of Enthusiasm. The Character he had assumed requir'd him to advance something of this Nature; he little car'd how wild and extravagant it was, so as it furnish'd him with a Pretence of burlesquing Christianity. It is therefore to little Purpose to pursue him through all his Self-Contradictions; only let me advise him, in the next Piece he brings on the Stage, to observe ^a *Horace's* Rules a little better, and to be somewhat more consistent with himself. All that I can think necessary to add on this Head, is, *First*, to state this Point our Author has misrepresented, and enquire how far, and in what Sense, *Faith*

* P. 26.

† P. 30.

‡ See p. 94.

^a Horat. Art. Poet. 125.

Si quid inexpertum Scenæ committis, & audes
Personam formare novam; servetur ad imum,
Qualis ab incepto processerit, & sibi constet.

may be call'd *the Gift of God*; and then I shall proceed to examine the Texts of Scripture he has produc'd in Support of his wild Scheme.

And here it is needless to observe, either, that the Object of our *Faith*, the Things to be believ'd, are from God; or, that all our intellectual Faculties are his Gift: The only Question that can properly fall under our present Consideration is, how far the Spirit of God may be suppos'd to influence, or assist us in the Exercise of these Faculties.

First then, ^b it has been already observ'd, that our Will and Affections have a great Ascendant over our Judgments; and that the same Evidence will operate very differently, according as we are previously inclin'd and dispos'd. If then the Holy Spirit is any way assistant to us in regulating our Affections, (as we think it evident from Scripture that he is) the Effect of these Assistances will spread itself to the Understanding. If a virtuous Disposition of Mind may be said to proceed from God, the Faith, which such a Disposition makes us capable of, may also properly be said to be his Gift. And thus the Holy Spirit enlightens our Understanding, by first regulating our Will and Affections, and so qualifying us to judge of religious Truths. And from hence all those Scriptures will receive an easy Interpretation, which tell us,

^b See before p. 17.

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^c that no one can come unto Christ, except the Father draw him; that every Man that hath heard, and hath learn'd of the Father, cometh unto him; ^d that his Sheep hear his Voice; ^e that he that is of God, beareth God's Words, &c. All that can be inferr'd from these Passages of Scripture, is, that a virtuous Disposition of Mind is necessary to give the Evidences of the Gospel their just Weight, and that such a Disposition is the Gift of God.

But farther, it is reasonable to believe, that the Holy Spirit assists us more immediately in the Exercise of our Understanding, as well as of our other Faculties; that he enlightens our Minds, quickens our Attention, directs us in our Search after Truth, and assists us in the Use of proper Means for the Attainment of it. ^f *God will give Wisdom liberally to them that ask him; g he will guide them that are meek, and such as are gentle, them shall he learn his Way.* ^h He is said to give unto us the Spirit of Wisdom, and to enlighten the Eyes of our Understanding.

ⁱ Our Author will excuse us from giving a critical and distinct Account of these Operations of the Spirit. We acknowledge with him, that they may be aptly compar'd to the Course of the Wind, or to the Growth of

^c John vi. 44, 45. See Dr. Hammond on John vi. 37.

^d John x. 27.

^e John viii. 47.

^f Jam. i. 5.

^g Psal. xxv. 8.

^h Eph. i. 17, 18.

ⁱ See

p. 107, 108.

Seed in the Earth; the Effect of them is plainly discern'd, though the Nature and Manner of them we cannot, *in any adequate Degree*, understand. ^k And since in natural and *earthly Things* we are forced often to believe what we cannot fully account for, we cannot but think it unreasonable to disbelieve, or *marvel* at a Doctrine, because we cannot perfectly comprehend it. I concern not myself whether what our Author here says is spoke *in Pretence*, or *in Truth*; I cannot but acknowledge the Justness of these Scripture-Comparisons, and join with him in his Application of them. In what follows, I fear, we shall widely differ.

First then, this Illumination of the Spirit is (as I apprehend) a Thing very different from immediate Inspiration, or Revelation, such as God vouchsafed to the Apostles, and first Preachers of the Gospel. As the Apostles were employ'd to deliver down to the whole World the Doctrines of *Christ*, it was necessary they should be infallibly assisted in what they deliver'd. What they taught was immediately inspir'd, and dictated to them by the Holy Ghost, and was not *their Word*, but *the Word of God*, who spake by them. Now this Doctrine, thus once deliver'd, they committed to Writing in the Holy Scriptures for the Benefit of succeeding Ages. But to

^k See John iii. 7, &c.

us God makes no new Revelation ; he only assists us in understanding what is already revealed in his written Word. We have no Reason now to expect the Gift of immediate Inspiration ; nor have we any Right to apply to ourselves such Promises, or Passages of Scripture, as are applicable only to the Apostles, and first Christians. *The Scriptures are our Rule of Faith ; ⁱ these are able to make us wise unto Salvation ; and therefore we have no Occasion of ^k a constant and particular Revelation imparted separately and supernaturally to every Individual. By Reasoning we may prove the Truth of Christianity, and the Authority of the Scriptures ; and they, with the ordinary Assistance of God's Spirit, will lead us to the Knowledge of all necessary Truths. Our Author may call the Scriptures ^l a dead Letter, and think ^m there is nothing in them that can deserve his least Notice. But his bare Assertion will not weigh with us against the Authority of the Apostle, ⁿ who assures us that the Scripture is profitable for Doctrine, for Reproof, for Correction, for Instruction in Righteousness, that the Man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good Works.*

Secondly, The Holy Spirit does not act upon us in such a Manner, as to exclude the

ⁱ 2 Tim. iii. 15.

^k See p. 112.

^l P. 61.

^m P. 59.

ⁿ 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.

Use of our Reason. We have not received a Spirit of Madnefs and Enthusiasm, but of *Truth, and Sobernefs, and of a sound Mind.* ° We read in the Scripture, that *the Lord open'd the Heart of Lydia, that she attended to the Things which were spoken of Paul.* It is here observable, first, that the Conversion of *Lydia* was owing to *the Lord*, who *open'd her Heart*; Secondly, that her *attending to the Things spoken by Paul*, was the immediate Effect of the Lord's opening her Heart; and then, her Belief was the Consequence of such *Attention*. This may, perhaps, in some Measure explain to us how Faith is wrought in us by the Holy Ghost. His Operation does not over-rule our Understanding; nor exclude the Effect of Reason and Evidence. But, he *opens our Hearts*; assists us in removing all unreasonable Prejudices; quickens our Attention; and disposes us seriously and impartially to consider the Proofs of our Religion; and then, these Proofs have their just Weight with us, and the Consequence of this is a full and rational Conviction.

Thirdly, Neither does this Illumination of the Spirit exclude the Use of human and ordinary Helps, to the Attainment of Christian Knowledge. The Truth of the Gospel is proved in the same Manner, as all other Truths of the same Nature are. The Holy

Spirit does not inspire us with this Knowledge ; but assists our Natural Faculties in examining and judging of its Evidences, by the same Methods, as all such Truths are examin'd. Other religious Truths may be learnt from the Scriptures ; and the Sense and Meaning of these Sacred Writings is to be learnt by the same Means, by which other Writings are usually expounded ; by a competent Skill in the Language, in which they were written ; by consulting the Expositions of learned Men, by enquiring into the Customs of the Age, the Scope of the Writer, and the like. The Holy Spirit assists us in the Use of these Means, and brings us to the Knowledge of the Truth, not without them, but with them. There is no Reason, as I know of, to imagine that the Assistance of the Spirit, and human Industry and Study, are consistent with each other. The Spirit of God never dwells with the Slothful, or with those, who presuming on his Inspiration, neglect the Use of those ordinary Means of Knowledge, which his Providence has afforded them.

Fourthly, This Operation of the Spirit is not instantaneous. He only assists our Endeavours, and his Illuminations are gradual, and keep Pace with our Endeavours. They are proportionate to our own Care, Diligence, and Sincerity in searching after the Truth.

Truth. ^p *If thou criest after Knowledge, and liftest up thy Voice for Understanding; if thou seekest her as Silver, and searchest for her, as for hid Treasures: Then shalt thou understand the Fear of the Lord; and find the Knowledge of God; for the Lord giveth Wisdom.*

^q *The Kingdom of God therefore may (in this Sense of the Word) be aptly compar'd to Seed sown in the Ground. The Blessing of Heaven, and, the Labour of Man, are both necessary to give it Increase; and God's Blessing usually keeps Pace with, and bears Proportion to our Care and Industry; as our Author finely observes, though in plain Contradiction to himself, ^r *However we may feel the Benefit of the Increase in the Harvest of our Toils, the Prograss and Method of its Advances shall still be sure to escape our nicest Observation.**

Fifthly, These Influences of the Holy Spirit are not irresistible. Though the Holy Ghost sanctifies our Will and enlightens our Understanding, yet we are not wholly passive in either Case. Our own Endeavours and Concurrence is presuppos'd. God deals with us, as with Rational Creatures. He does not use any Violence, or Constraint, to us; he does not put us out of the Possibility of sinning, or mistaking; but he gives us all

^p Prov. ii. 3, &c.

^q See Mar. iv. 26, &c.

^r P. 103. comp. P. 58, 59.

necessary Means, both of Virtue, and Knowledge; he reaches out to us all proper Assistances; and leaves it to our own Choice, whether we will make use of them, or no. And from hence^s we may give an easy *Account how the Want of Faith may come to be such a Crime.* It is not because Men cannot, but because they will not see. ^t *A rebellious Opposition of all the gracious Instances of the Divine Spirit to enlighten our Hearts, a wilful Repugnance to all his earnest Solicitations to accept of his saving Truths, will, in our Author's own Account, make Infidelity criminal.*

Lastly, It is not to be expected that the Holy Spirit should render us infallible, or secure us from all *Possibility of Error and Imposition.* This could not be done, without altering our Nature; nor is it necessary it should be done. He has given us sufficient Means of understanding his Will, and made the Way of Knowledge easy to every diligent and honest Enquirer. The Proofs of Religion are (as we apprehend) sufficient to satisfy every reasonable Person; and in the Scripture all necessary Truths are clearly and plainly reveal'd. ^v *If any Man will do his Will, he shall know of the Doctrine, whether it be of God.* But God has provided no Remedy against *Obstinacy, Impiety, and Perverseness.* As to other Matters of lesser Importance, it

^s See p. 63.^t P. 64.^v John vii 17.

it is not necessary, nor does God require we should *think all alike*. In these Things Men may innocently differ, and yet * *keep the Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace,* ^y and *with one Mind, and one Mouth glorify God even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Thus have I explained, as briefly as I could, how far the Holy Spirit may be suppos'd to assist us in the Exercise of our intellectual Faculties ; if the Reader desires farther Satisfaction, he may consult Dr. *Clagett's* Discourse of the Operations of the Spirit, or Dr. *Stebbing's* excellent Abridgment of it. All that remains farther on this Head, is, to consider such Texts, as our Author has produc'd to support his Scheme.

^z The *First* is, 1 Cor. xii. 3. — *No Man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.* — But does it follow from hence, that no Man can believe in *Christ*, unless the Holy Ghost *irradiate his Soul at once with a thorough Conviction*. If the Assistance of the Holy Spirit is any way necessary towards producing this Faith in us, the Apostle's Expression will be fully justified, without supposing any Necessity of immediate Inspiration. But the Truth is, the Words do not imply so much as even this. ^a Many of the *Corinthians* va-

* Eph. iv. 3.
56. 1 Cor. xii. 3.
Comment.

^y Rom. xv. 6.

^z Page

^a See *Locke's* Paraphrase and

lued themselves upon the Excellency of their *spiritual Gifts*; and this produc'd great-Contentions and Disorders amongst them. The Apostle, in this Chapter, urges several excellent Considerations to correct these vain Conceits: His first Argument is, that they were all of them alike *Spiritual*, ^b acted by *one and the self-same Spirit*, though his *Operations* were different in different Persons. He begins — ^c *Ye know that ye were Gentiles, &c.* — Before your Conversion you were all alike, none of you were *Spiritual*; all *carried away unto these dumb Idols, even as ye were led.* — ^d *Wherefore I give you to understand, that no Man speaking by the Spirit of God, calleth Jesus accursed; and that no Man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.* — That is, Let me tell you, that as no Man, who opposes *Jesus Christ*, or his Religion, has *the Spirit of God*, (notwithstanding the Pretences of some Judaizing Teachers) so all, who believe in *Christ*, are actuated by *the Holy Ghost*. All *Christians* are, in this respect, on a Level; nor is there any Reason for one to undervalue another, as if he was not *Spiritual*, as well as himself. This Text therefore, though, when taken by itself, it may carry a Sound of Words at first View favourable to our Author, yet, when we come to consider the Apostle's Scope and

^b Ver. 11.^c Ver. 2.^d Ver. 3.

Design, will appear to mean no more than this, that all *Christians* have the Gift of the Holy Ghost, some one Way, and some another. As to the Gift of immediate Inspiration, here is not one Word about it.

^e Another obscure Passage our Author takes Refuge in is, 1 John v. 10. — *He that believeth on the Son of God, hath the Witness in himself.* — It is not perhaps easy to ascertain the Sense of this Passage together with that of the foregoing Verses. But I think it appears from the Context, ^g and from the whole Tenor of this Epistle, that the Apostle is not arguing here against profess'd Unbelievers, but against pretended Christians, who denied the Reality of our Lord's Incarnation. ^h He refers them to the Testimony of *the Water, the Blood, and the Spirit*; that is, ⁱ as the best Commentators interpret it, the Descent of the Holy Ghost upon *Christ* at his Baptism, his Death, and Resurrection, and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit imparted to his Disciples: These all concurr'd in proving that he was God and Man in the same Person. St. *John* adds — *He that believeth on the Son of God, hath the Witness in himself* — that is — He that is rightly instructed in the Christian Faith, is provided with sufficient Proof against the

^e Page 56.

^f 1 John v. 10.

^g See Chap.

ii. 18, 19, 26. Chap. iv. 1.

^h Ver. 8.

ⁱ See

Hammond.

false Doctrines of these Seducers; but—*he that believeth not God, hath made him a Lyar, because he believeth not the Record that God gave of his Son*; — that is, — he who calls himself a Christian, and yet denies our Saviour's Incarnation, gives God the Lye, in denying what he hath so plainly revealed. This seems to me to be the most natural Sense of the Words; and, according to this Interpretation, this Witness in themselves does not relate to any immediate Revelation, but to those Instructions and Proofs, which every Christian had received. It is true, that this Passage is somewhat obscure: We know so little of the Doctrines of these Seducers, of their Manner of arguing, or the Phrases they made use of, that 'tis not to be wondered at, if we cannot account for every Expression in an Epistle, purposely designed as a Preservative against their Errors. This is pretty certain, that these Persons were Enthusiasts; and therefore, we may be sure, we widely mistake the Apostle's Meaning, if we imagine that any thing he says favours Enthusiasm. However, let us suppose that St. *John* is here speaking of the Truth of Christianity; yet why must this internal *Witness* be a *particular Revelation imparted supernaturally to every Individual*? If this were the Case, why should the Apostle refer us to any other Testimony? If we have such ^a an

infallible Dictator, such a ^b *living Witness* within us, ^c *what need have we of farther Witnesses?* (as our Author himself asks). We might much more reasonably suppose the Apostle, by this *Witness in themselves*, means the Gift of the Holy Ghost visible in its Effects on their Life and Behaviour, and also in those miraculous Powers conferred on many of the first Christians. And so many of the Commentators expound it.

^d What our Author adds, of the Holy Spirit's being called *the Comforter*, and our Bodies being *styled the Temples of the Holy Ghost*, I may safely pass over. When he will attempt to prove, that there is no other Way of comforting Men, but by an immediate Revelation; or that, as soon as the Holy Spirit enters into us, our rational Soul forsakes us, it will be then Time enough to answer him. Nor need I put the Reader in Mind, that 'tis not ^d *the Operation of the Spirit*, but ^e *the Gospel*, that is so significantly termed *the Power of God unto Salvation*.

^f But our Author proceeds to tell us, that *the Apostle calls this the witnessing of the Spirit with our Spirit*. — But here, again, his Memory fails him. The whole Verse runs thus: ^g *The Spirit itself beareth Witness with our Spirit, that we are the Children of God*.

^b Page 60.

^c P. 59.

^d P. 56.

^e Rom. i. 16.

^f P. 56.

^g Rom. viii. 16.

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— Our Author has forgot this latter Clause, which plainly shews, that the whole is nothing to his Purpose. The Apostle's Meaning is, that *the Holy Spirit* enables good Christians to rejoice in the Testimony of a good Conscience; from whence arises a reasonable Persuasion of God's Favour to them, and a comfortable Hope of a blessed Inheritance in the World to come. But what is this to the *Source and Origin of our Faith*? There is not a Word of *the Principle of Gospel-evidence* neither here, nor in the whole Chapter.

^h In the next Page our Author produces some Passages of Scripture, where ⁱ *Faith* is called *the Gift of God*; and where *Christ* says, — ^k *No Man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father*. — We have already shewn in what Sense *Faith* may be called *the Gift of God*; but in the first Passage here cited, it is not *Faith* (as I humbly apprehend) but *Salvation*, that is said to be *the Gift of God*, and *not of ourselves*. But let him take it in his own Sense: Can *God give us Faith* no other Way, but by ^l *irradiating our Souls at once with a thorough Conviction*? This, instead of a Reproof, would carry with it a fair Excuse for those unbelieving *Jews*, whom our Saviour,

^h Page 57.

ⁱ Eph. ii. 8.

^k John vi. 65.

^l See p. 56.

in the latter Passage, is speaking of. Had the only Reason of their Want of *Faith* been, because *God* had not *given it them*, and *irresistibly* stamped it on their Minds, they could not have been blamed for their Infidelity. But they wanted an honest Heart, sincerely desirous to know the Truth. This was the Cause of their Infidelity, and this made it so highly criminal.

^m But now we come at last to the *strongest Confirmation*, — the *plainest Declaration and Direction* what kind of Evidence Christians were always to trust to, and rely on, for the Information and Assurance of their Minds. — ⁿ *The Spirit of Truth* (saith Christ) *which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me.* — And again, — ^o *When the Spirit of Truth is come, he will guide you into all Truth.* — What can be answered to such full Proof as this? — except it be to desire the Reader to read on a little, and then he will find immediately after the first Quotation these Words: — ^p *And ye also shall bear Witness, because ye have been with me from the Beginning:* — After the second Passage quoted, it follows, — *and he will shew you Things to come.* — If then this Gentleman can lay Claim to the Gift of Prophecy; if he can prove, that he is above seventeen

^m Page 57.

ⁿ John xv. 26.

^o John xvi. 13.

^p John xv. 27.

hundred Years old, and was *with Christ from the Beginning*, we may allow this Promise to belong to him; if not, we must be at Liberty to think the Words are applicable only to the Apostles. Our Author has certainly great Reason to guard against *the specious Exceptions of prejudiced Wit; the evasive Constructions, which may be imposed on particular Passages.* No, Sir, we stand in Need of no *evasive Constructions*, and have no Occasion to set our *Wits* to work; we have generally little else to do, but to turn over our Bible, and transcribe the Passages entire which you have curtailed.

I pass by some Texts of Scripture, which our Author seems to bring in rather by way of Allusion, than Argument, and proceed to Page 76, where we have some more Quotations of the same Nature. —^s When St. Peter confessed his Faith in *Christ*, he answered, and said unto him, — *Flesh and Blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in Heaven.* — I did not know before, that *Flesh and Blood* signified *Reason*. But I cannot give the Sense of this Passage better than in the judicious Dr. Hammond's Words: — “ This Faith of thine is not
 “ built on human Testimony, but upon the
 “ Miracles and Doctrines, which thou hast
 “ heard and seen, which are the Testimonies

• See p. 76. • P. 58. • P. 76. Matth. xvi. 16, 17.

“ of

“ of God himself, whereby he hath testified
“ of me.”

† Again, *Christ* tells the *Jews*, that *they shall be all taught of God*; and that *every Man that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto him*. — I hope, after what has been said, it is needless to add much in Answer to such Proofs as these. It is God, as we have said already, who gives us a Disposition of Mind ready to receive the Truth; and therefore all Believers may properly be said to *be taught of God*, and to *have learned of the Father*. And this was more especially true with regard to the *Jews*, who lived under the Advantages of a Revelation, which, had they paid due Attention to, they would have been prepared for the Reception of the Gospel.

‡ But are we not *told expressly, that Faith is the Evidence of Things not seen*? — Yes: And what would a common Reader infer from thence, but that *Faith ought to be the Result of our own Reasonings*; that some *Evidence* is necessary to convince the Understanding, before we can place our *Faith* on the *Things not seen*? No, says our Author, if we are *left free to enquire into the Truth of all Fundamentals in Religion*; this is to *make Faith only the Evidence of Things seen*. This is notable arguing indeed! Is this Gen-

† Page 76. John vi. 45.

‡ P. 77.

§ Heb. xi. 1.

tleman really unable to distinguish between seeing the Force of the Evidence, and seeing the Thing itself? Or does he think we can have no rational Assurance of any Thing, but what we see with our own Eyes? Must every Merchant, who trades to *Jamaica*, first see the Place, before ever he sets out for it? Or is he not *left free to enquire*, whether there is such a Place or no? And may he not *be able to give an intelligible and satisfactory Account* of the Reasons of his Voyage before he undertakes it? * But our Author tells us, that they who would *teach us, that our Faith ought to be the Result of our own Reasonings, take upon them to reverse the authentick Precept, and bid us walk by Sight, instead of Faith.* — So, it seems, this Gentleman takes *walking by Sight*, and following our *Reason*, to be the same Thing: He knows no Difference between his Understanding and his Senses. I should rather have thought, that what we actually *see*, is not the proper Object, either of *Reason* or *Faith*; and that because we believe in *Things not seen*, we ought, on that very Account, to have good Reasons for our *Faith*. God is himself *invisible*; † but his *eternal Power and Godhead are clearly seen*, and evidently demonstrated *from the Creation of the World*. The Things of a future State are *Things not*

† Page 77.

‡ Rom. i. 20.

seen as yet; but God has given us sufficient Proof, and full Evidence of them.

There remains only one more Passage of Scripture to be considered, ^z which, if we will take this Writer's Word, most fully, and beyond all Possibility of Misconception, describes to us the true Nature of Faith, in profest Opposition to that mistaken Notion of a Rational one, which some had, it seems, erroneously entertained. — ^a The Righteousness which is of Faith, (saith St. Paul) speaketh on this wise: Say not in thine Heart, Who shall ascend into Heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) Or, Who shall descend into the Deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the Dead.) But what saith it? The Word is nigh thee, even in thy Mouth, and in thy Heart; that is the Word of Faith, which we preach. — This Passage is (it must be owned) somewhat difficult, too difficult indeed to build such a Doctrine upon beyond all Possibility of Misconception. But I would ask, who those Persons were, who had erroneously entertained this mistaken Notion of a Rational Faith? ^b Our Author tells us, that they were well-meaning Devotees, who had a Zeal of God, but not according to Knowledge. But this, one would think, should rather prove them to be *Enthusiasts*, than *Rational Di-*

^z Page 79.

^a Rom. x. 6, &c.

^b P. 80.

vines. If he could produce any authentick Account of any such *Rational Divines*, who flourished in those Days, against whom the Apostle might be supposed to write, it would go a great Way towards establishing his Interpretation. ^c But such *strict Criticism* is not his Care. I must therefore beg Leave to inform him, that they were *Jews*, or *Jewish Converts*, that the Apostle here writes against; that they insisted on the Necessity, and Sufficiency of the Works of the *Mosaical Law*; and that on these Points all the Apostle's Reasonings in this Epistle turn. He had no Controversy with them about the *true Principle of Gospel-evidence*. And, in the Passage before us, he is not speaking of *Faith*, but of the *Righteousness which is of Faith*; not of Belief, but of Practice. We need only look back to *ver. 5.* and there we shall find, that the Apostle is comparing the *Gospel-Covenant* with that of *Moses*, with respect to the Practicableness and Easiness of the Conditions of it. — ^d *Moses describeth the Righteousness, which is of the Law, that the Man, which doth those Things, shall live by them.* — The Terms of the *Mosaical Covenant* were a punctual Performance of every Part of the Law, which it was impossible for Man, in his present corrupt Condition, to come up to. But the Terms of the Gos-

^c See p. 105.^d Rom. x. 5.

pel were plain and easy. The Phrases here of *ascending up into Heaven, and descending into the Deep*, are proverbial, and denote great and unfurmountable Difficulties. On the contrary, being *nigh in our Hearts and Mouths*, are Expressions which import, that the Thing so spoken of, is easy and practicable. — *The Righteousness, which is of Faith, speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine Heart, &c.* — The Terms of the Gospel-righteousness or Justification, are no way difficult or impracticable, we need not now say, *Who shall ascend into Heaven to bring down a Teacher, and a Saviour?* For God has sent one: Or, *Who shall descend into the Deep, to bring up our Christ, or Saviour?* For God has raised him, who descended thither for us, and *was raised again for our Justification*. All that was difficult in the Work of our Salvation, *Christ* hath performed for us; nothing is required of us, but what is plain to be known, and easy to be practised: *The Word is nigh thee, even in thy Mouth, and in thy Heart.* — Our Duty is now clearly revealed; and its Precepts are agreeable to our Nature, such as our own Reason and Conscience dictate to us.

I have now, I think, examin'd all our Author's Proofs from Scripture. But, perhaps, I am all this while fighting the Air, and beating only the Case of *Diogenes*. We cannot suppose this Gentleman in earnest in his Allegation

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legation of Scripture-Proofs, after he has told us, ^a that there is nothing in *these suspicious Repositories of human Testimony, that can deserve our least Notice, or be thought of Consequence to engage a Moment's Attention.* And it must be own'd that his Practice is answerable to his Profession; he does not seem to have bestow'd *a Moment's Attention* on any one Text he has quoted. It is beneath him to attend to the Scope and Connection of Scripture; such ^b *Exactness and Punctuality is by no Means his Care.* But pray let me ask him to what Purpose he produces these Passages of Scripture? Does he seriously intend them as Proofs? then surely he ought to have bestowed a little *Care* in settling the true Meaning of his Proofs. Is it then his Design, to charge the Scripture as teaching and abetting the wild Doctrine he would give us as *the true Principle of Gospel-Evidence?* And does he think such a Charge can be supported by a few ^b *particular Texts* quoted from his Memory, without caring how he has *mistaken, or misapplied them?* Or does he mean no more than to take every Opportunity of ridiculing and exposing the Scripture? Even in this View he should not have ^b *laid himself open so unguardedly;* a little Attention to the Sense and Design of the Scriptures he has quoted might have been

^a Page 59.

^b P. 105.

proper, lest he should be found to ridicule what he does not understand, and the Contempt and Laughter should return upon himself. But whatever are his Views and Designs, it may concern us to vindicate the Scripture from his Misrepresentations. I cannot indeed lay claim to any great Merit in making the *sagacious Discovery*^c. His Quotations, (as I have already observ'd) most of them answer themselves; one need not ^d *consult the acute Lessons of a Hammond, or a Grotius upon the Subject*; but only give the Passages entire, which he has misquoted. He has indeed given us three or four Texts, which have some Difficulty in them, in the Exposition of which learned Men differ. If I may not have explained these to every one's Satisfaction, I hope at least I have shewn they are nothing to his Purpose.

^e But he *refers us to the great Original*; ^f to other *innumerable Passages throughout the whole Scripture*; ^g to the *joint Tenor and Tendency of the whole*. — But what will such general References prove, unless it be that he is resolv'd to make up in Confidence, what he wants in Proof? This is just as if a Pleader at the Bar, after he had sought for Evidence in vain, and all his own Witnesses had depos'd against him, should plead that the Thing was notorious, and all the World knew it.

^c See p. 105. ^d See p. 112. ^e P. 58. ^f P. 56, 57. ^g P. 106.

But I shall now take my Leave of him for the present. This Answer has taken me up more Time, and run out to a greater Length, than I at first imagined; and therefore, rather than defer the Publication any longer, I thought proper to send these Sheets now to the Press, and hope soon to present the World with the two remaining Chapters.

F I N I S.

ADVERTISEMENT.

SINCE these Sheets were transcrib'd for the Press, I receiv'd the first Part of Dr. Leland's Answer, and find he has in several Particulars anticipated me. Had I seen it sooner, it might have sav'd me some Trouble: I read it, however, with a double Pleasure; I was glad both to see so able a Hand engag'd in the Controversy, and to find I agreed so nearly in many Points with so ingenious and judicious a Writer.

E R R A T A.

Page	Line			
27.	24.		<i>dele</i>	of Expression
28.	10.	<i>for</i>	or	<i>read</i> for
47.	2.	<i>for</i>	Incision	<i>read</i> Infition
59.	10.	<i>for</i>	doubty	<i>read</i> doughty
71.	12.	<i>for</i>	compleat	<i>read</i> competent
75.	20.	<i>for</i>	Tyral	<i>read</i> Tryal
80.	18.	<i>for</i>	Domonsfration	<i>read</i> Demonstration
96.	8.	<i>for</i>	Remptations	<i>read</i> Temptations
ib.	25.	<i>dele</i>	from Are	<i>to</i> Futurity
125.	1.	<i>for</i>	unreasonably	<i>read</i> unseasonably
ib.	21.	<i>for</i>	Doubtings	<i>read</i> Doublings
145.	1.	<i>after</i>	trusted	<i>put a</i> Comma
208.	10.	<i>for</i>	amounted	<i>read</i> amounts

P. 130. in Notes, r. See above, p. 29, 30. And there are some Mistakes in the References to Texts of Scripture.



